

All Things in Heaven and Earth Part I

by Billybobjoe47s

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Summary: All fiction is simply thoughts leaked from other universes. When a set of unfortunate circumstances break all the barriers between universes, what chaos will ensue? (Note: Contains a whole lot more universes and characters than mentioned here.)

1. The Event

****All Things in Heaven and Earth****

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This story contains 3000% of obscure and not-so-obscure pop references recommended daily.

All dialogue and OCs are mine.

A/N: Hello everyone! This is an epic crossover fiction, starring me back in the long-gone days of high school. This is my first serious attempt at a fanfiction, so please review and tell me what you think. Feel free to point out problems or inconsistencies.

_Also, Chapter 6 should be up within the next week, depending on how much life decides to intervene.

>

_So, Enjoy!

>

****Part I: Breaking Apart****

Chapter 1: The Event

****Earth Prime, E-day****

5:47 PM

Brennan, aged 14, was having a cruddy day. First, waking up and falling into his nightstand, leaving a nasty welt that still smarted, and then finding out that the water heater had broken and there was no hot water for him to take a shower. He shivered at the memory of the ice-cold shower. Then, halfway on the trip to school, both bike tires had gone flat after running over a hive of very angry ants. At school, it was worse. Falling asleep in class, tardies in 3 classes, detention after school, and a pile of homework so large he staggered under the weight. Then, returning to the bike rack to drag his useless bike home, it had been stolen, leaving the flat wheel still locked to the bike rack. Then walking the several miles home, only to find out that his mother had made meatloaf for dinner. It was almost as bad as the cartoons portrayed it.

He sighed and tried to relax over the slight headache he still had from this morning, turning on the television. News, news, news, news, and Dora the Explorer were the only thing he had on their free cable television, and there were no new shows recorded. He sighed and flipped through all the news, hoping at least for some SportsCenter. However, every news channel was covering the same thing: a new-fangled bomb being tested near Area 51. According to the identical reports by all the on-scene journalists, this bomb was supposed to revolutionize war and guarantee the security of America for years to come.

Brennan mockingly thought, '_what a load of junk to be spitting out, when they haven't even tested the thing to see if it works as advertised.' _However, a bomb exploding, even on TV, sounded more interesting than seeing if he could try to pry his little sister off the computer without getting stab wounds. He settled in to watch the show.

The scientist in charge of the experiment counted down "5...4...3...2...1... ignition." The bomb exploded with a flash of light so bright that even through the TV Brennan had to look away and shade his eyes. But something infinitely more interesting and concerning happened. After the bomb went off, the earth started shaking on the television, which Brennan just took to mean it was more powerful than anyone had expected. However, immediately, the house started shaking! After a few minutes, the shaking had died down, but Brennan had some disturbing thoughts: "_If our house shook that bad from here over 400 miles away, what did it do to the people standing there?" _He looked back to the television and was surprised to find that nothing seemed to be seriously damaged and no one was hurt. The scientist was being interviewed by several news networks, and said, "While the bomb was a success, the shaking caused by this is a major concern. Hold on a minute..." and he listened to an earpiece. "We are getting disturbing reports from the Eastern seaboard, Hawaii, and... other seismological sites around the world. The earthquake has affected every area on the globe, even

boats at sea, and all the sites recorded a quake of the same magnitude every time. These disturbing numbers are being confirmed nowâ€¦.. Please wait a few minutes for confirmation." While all the journalists started wondering about the explosion and spouting theories, Brennan mused '_What sort of earthquake acts like that? Not any natural or artificial earthquake ever beforeâ€¦.. what have they done?' _ Eight minutes of exited jabbering, frantic Twitter feeds, and rumors spreading like wildfire later, the scientist tuned back in, pale and shaking. "I have just gotten one of the most disturbing reports I have ever heard. Astronomers studying the Moon, Sun, and Mars have reported that a tremor, _matching the magnitude of the tremors here, _ have shaken the Solar System. They all believe that if given enough time, this tremor will be felt by every particle of matter for at least 20 light-years, based on the speed of propagation. This news has shaken me, because this tremor apparently follows no rules of physics, including the speed of light, for all these reports came simultaneously. I am afraid we may have just done something horrible to our universe."

All the journalists and everyone watching the news instantly started flooding the airwaves with reports, speculations, theories, and rumors. Twitter and other social media were forced to shut down because of the sheer amount of panicked messages being sent, reports were coming in that the stock market had already started dropping, and panic started to infuse the world.

Brennan, shaken by these happenings, decided to take a walk to get his mind off these disturbing events. He called out to his mother, obliviously whistling in the kitchen, cleaning up dinner, (for his mother was not very connected to technology, and when message alerts started flooding her phone, had simply turned it off.) and left out the front door to the city park. He decided to get away from people in general, who had been giving him a hard time recently, by sneaking into the wilderness area behind the city park that was off-limits.

****Toonity, E-Day****

5:47 PM

Buster Bunny, a blue rabbit wearing a red T-shirt, said, "Alright people, time to film the conclusion of our Big Bang special! Snap to and get moving!" He sighed. This was, to date, the 300th episode filmed since the cancellation of his show on Reality, in the hopes that they would reinstate their series. Plucky Duck, a green mallard with a serious case of the egotistic and a lisp reminiscent of Daffy Duck, slapped him on the back and said "Great job, Busther! If this final scene doesthn't convince Warner Brosth to sthtart our sthow back up again, they're insthane!"

He gave a weak smile and said, "Yeah Pluck, I'm sure that this explosion will be our road back to fame!" Plucky exclaimed, "Fame! Fortune again! Thankyouthankyouthankyou, Busther!" and skipped to his spot whistling. Buster said, "Alright everyone, places! Remember that after the final explosion defeating Monty, we all sing the Tiny Toon theme song!" Monty, full name Montana Max, a young, bratty human child spoiled by his rich parents, complained,

" Why do I have to be in the plane loaded with TNT when it explodes? While I won't die, it'll really smart tomorrow! Can't we hire a stunt

double or something to blow up instead?"

Buster reminded him "We don't have the budget for stunt doubles anymore, remember? And you already used all your monthly allowance to buy the Queen Mary! Now get in the plane, we're about to start filming!"

Monty sighed and got in the plane, which was then hoisted up and started, smoking. While the cameras started filming, the plane spiraled out of control with Montana Max screaming and beating on the cockpit glass. When the plane hit the ground, a tremendous explosion rang out, and a crater was blown into the ground. However, Buster yelled, "Cut! Cut! What special effects artist threw an earthquake in there? That wasn't in the script!"

The special effects artists behind him shrugged. "We didn't put any earthquakes in there!"

Buster scratched his head. "Well, if you guys didn't put it in there, than who did?" The rest of the cast shrugged as well. Buster muttered, "That's impossible! Earthquakes just don't happen here in Toonity naturally! Not to mention, but that blew our budget and we can't afford to retake the scene." Montana then wobbled out of the hole, dazed and blackened, and asked to no one in particular, "What did I miss?" He then fell unconscious. Buster sighed and walked, shoulders slumped, over to where his best friend, Babs Bunny waited. Babs cried, "Oh Buster, what are we going to do? That ruined our chances of getting back on air in Reality, and I can already feel myself fading away!" Buster noticed with concern that Babs was losing her regular pink color and turning lighter. Babs wasn't known for resilience against fading, and with their hope of gaining attention gone, she was already starting to fade away.

Buster and the gang all walked, downcast, to their homes. Buster slumped on the hollowed log that was the entrance to his humble home, and sighed. What was he going to do? As the co-host, the others all depended on him to make things right, but Buster saw no solution. He sat there, despondent, as the sun slowly marked off the passing of time.

****Heltus, E-Day****

5:47 PM

Lucifer XVII sighed. His kingdom was starting to fall apart from the increasingly volcanic eruptions, and the Earthlings had recently developed a bomb which, according to his scientists, would make it impossible to simply roll over the nations in that world, so there was no escape from this pit, just when all the expenditures of valuable money had been justified with the forming of a capable army. He frowned at another volcano and the weirdly fast earthquake that followed, but frowned when he heard a mental call from his Minister of Science. "_Lord, a tremor has just shaken our entire universe, and may have ...altered the strategic picture, due to its unusual properties."_ Lucifer scowled. "_In what way?" "We're not quite sure yet, my Lord." _He mentally yelled, "_Well than be sure! Call me when you find anything important. If what you bother me with is trivial, than you can look forward to a long ordeal in the Volcano Corps." _The Minister gulped so loud it was audible mentally. "_Of course, my Lord." _

2. The Beginning

Chapter 3 : The Fateful Meeting

_A/N: Well, here's chapter 3, so enjoy!
>

****Toonity, E-day+1****

7:35 AM

Babs, still tired, and losing more energy by the minute, walked slowly past Busters' house and noticed he was sleeping in the yard, and oddly enough, there was a man limply sprawled next to him! She rushed over, and pulled a handy bucket of water out of her pocket and splashed it on the two. Buster woke up suddenly.

"Wha- oh Babs, it's you. I had the most horrible dream lastâ€"why am I outside?" He then noticed the man coughing next to him, and his eyes bulged out of his head. "AAAAHHHH!" He jumped inside his burrow and hid, only his ears and the tip of his head sticking out.

Babs asked, perplexed, "Why are you screaming, and who is this guy?" She then noticed the non-tooniness of the character and put two and two together. "Whaâ€"Huh? How'd this guy get here? It-It isn't possible!" Buster, still hyperventilating, whispered, "I don't know, but he isn't supposed to be here." Babs rushed to hide beside Buster.

Brennan woke up coughing, when a bucket of cold water was splashed on him. "Mom! What the flip?" He tried to sit up and felt an intense pain in his head and he fell over again. "Unngh, not feeling so goodâ€". He then opened his eyes and saw the pastel colored sky and the disturbingly yellow sun. "Where am I?" He looked around and saw the two bunnies staring at him. "What theâ€". MUTANT RABBITS!" He tried to bolt upright, but fell groaning to the ground when a bolt of lightning stabbed through his skull. "Oh man, just kill me now!"

Buster slowly crept out of his hiding spot and approached him. "Are you alright?" Brennan yelled, "Heck no, what does it look like? I feel like someone hit me with an anvil!" Just then, an anvil plummeted to earth, landing near him. "What the heck?! I coulda been killed! Why are there people chucking anvils around?" He slowly stood up and limped towards the bunnies. "Look, I don't care if you're gonna eat me, but please just do it now!"

Babs said, "Why would we ever eat you? We're vegetarian!"

Buster added, "We would never do that! Not to mention, we would be in our rights, you flying into the air and leaving a hole in my front lawn! That'll cost money, money I don't have, to fix!"

Brennan asked, "Sooooo.. you're not going to hurt me?"

Babs said, "Oh heavens no! why would we?"

Brennan, still hurting, muttered, "Well that's all fine and good but

I'm still in a strange place with giant talking bunnies wearing clothes, and the sky and well, everything is messed up!" Buster replied (having heard with his excellent hearing), "Wellâ€¦ on that note, I think I can explain some of that. You see, you're in a place called Acme Acres, and we're Buster and Babs Bunny." "No relation." they chorused.

Brennan dazedly said, "Hey those names sound familiarâ€¦ But you can't be real! You're all just characters from an old cartoon!" Babs and Buster, delighted, ask, "You recognize us?"

"Well, yeah, but not many others would. I've watched all your old shows and even read some of your fan fiction."

Babs then noticed that she no longer felt sick and tired. She said, "Oh, Buster, someone still recognizes us! That's so wonderful! This makes me feel so much better!" and gave Buster a big kiss on the lips. Buster turned red and stammered, "That's great, Babsy." Brennan then noticed his stomach was growling and his lips were chapped. "Hey, do you have any food and water? I'm starving." Buster said, "Sure. One bowl of carrot stew and a glass of water coming right up!" He started to walk to his burrow, but was stopped by Babs.

"Oh no! You can't cook carrot stew at all! Let me do it," Arguing all the way to the burrow, they jumped inside, followed by Brennan.

Savoring the actually quite good carrot stew curled up on the couch, Brennan asked, "So what exactly has been going on for 17 years? I mean, your show was canceled in 1995." Buster said, "Well, since Acme Looniversity is a junior high school and high school combined, and since you've noticed that we obviously live long lives, (I mean, look at Bugs! Going strong, and he's turning 75 next year!) we've just been going to school hoping our show would come back in Reality."

Just then, an alarm clock rang, and Gogo Dodo, an interesting (read insane) fellow that seemed to be everywhere, smacked both the rabbits with a mallet, and said, "Cuckoo! Cuckoo! If you're late to school, you're cuckoo!" then jumped back inside the alarm clock.

Brennan winced. "Are you guys alright?" Babs said, woozily, "Just give us a sec and we'll be fine. Oh yeah, stay here. Since you're from Reality, we really wouldn't want all of Acme Acres to panic if you showed up. You can use Buster's Lametendo, ok?" Buster growled, "Hey! Did you ask me before giving permission for him to use my stuff?" Babs winked. "If you don't want to be hit by a mallet, yes, I did." "Oh, all right, he can use my stuff. But no carrots, you hear me?" muttered Buster. "Of course! I'll survive on that ramen you've got in the cabinet." "Well, see ya in 7 hours, Brennan" they said.

Brennan soon got bored of the Lametendo living up to its name. "Oh man, the graphics are hurting my eyes! This is bad even for 1995! I wish I had an Xbox 360, and some Halo." Just then, out of nowhere, an oddly shaped video game system boasting, 'Xsphere 360' hit Brennan on the head. "Ow! And just when my headache went away. Hey, what's this?" He picked the Xsphere up. "Yes! I love cartoon physics!" He plugged it in and spent an hour blasting aliens away with Halo: Beach. After he finished the game with his legendary skills, (being ranked in the

top 1000 video gamers in the world did that to you) he decided to take a nap. He soon fell asleep on the couch.

He woke up when Babs and Buster jumped in, rattling the ground with the weight of the backpacks from school. Brennan yawned, stretched, and groaned. "Oh, man, it's hot in here, and my back hurts." Buster and Babs looked up from their homework at the table and stopped, their jaws dropping open and hitting the floor. "Um, Brennan? It looks like we have a problem." They stared in disbelief, for Brennan had shrunk a few inches, most of the hair on his body was now light blue, and there was a faint black outline around his body. Most disturbingly, it appeared that he was growing a tail out of the small of his back!

Brennan asked, "What? Why are you looking at me like that?" Buster said "Well, you appear to be, umâ€¦ turning into a toon." Brennan scoffed, "Yeah right! What elaborate practical joke is this? Any second you're gonna pelt me with cream pies."

Babs said, "For once we're not kidding. Here, look." She tossed a handy mirror to Brennan. He looked inside and saw his now light blue hair.

"Well, that's just great! What am I going to tell my mom when I get back home? 'Hi mom, I'm a cartoon now?' She won't take that well." Buster suddenly remembered something. "Oh crap, Bugs, as principal of the Looniversity, he'll be able to tell when another toon enters Acme Acres if they are school age! You're notâ€¦ School age are you?" Brennan said, "Sorry, but I'm right in the middle of ninth grade." Buster started pacing. "If we can't get you a toon before tomorrow, there's going to be an awkward moment soon when you turn toony enough to catch Bugs' attention. I just hope it doesn't happen in the middle of school. Bad things could happen. The last time Bugs got that feeling during school hours, Yakko, Wakko, and Dot showed up, and I still remember that day." He and Babs both shivered.

Babs just then got an idea, and a lightbulb popped into existence above her head, just to be snatched by Buster. "Sorry, Babs. No light bulb takes today. I need that for the spare bedroom, because I'm out of light bulbs."

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Babs then said while already starting to move, "Then there's no time to waste!" She grabbed Buster by the ear and hopped outside. "Stay here Brennan. We'll be back in a bit!" Brennan sighed. Another couple hours of Lametendo and Xsphere.

****Earth 2, E-day+1****

4:00 PM

Dr. Halsey sighed. "Sorry to call you out of retirement, Noble 6, but we registered a solar-system wide tremor yesterday, something possibly caused by alien interference. Ever since your traumatic near-death on the Glassing of Reach, I know you don't have much tendency for missions involving possible combat, but all the other Spartans and Special Ops teams are out-system on assignments. I need you to investigate these odd spots of tachyon disturbance on the planet. Also, watch out for Covenant spy teams. I know we're not at war anymore, but they'll be itching for a look at these spots also, and we know that, allies or not, they have spy teams here." and with the grace to look slightly embarrassed, "Just like we have recon teams in their territory."

Noble 6, armor no longer grey and new, but pitted, blackened and scratched from years of taking on enemies to humanity, saluted. "Yes, ma'am. Consider it done."

On an Eagle, heading to the nearest tachyon disturbance, Noble 6 checked his venerable, but still lethal, weapons. The original Assault Rifle, still in service while waiting for replacements and largely unchanged after 50 years of use, his M6 personal sidearm, the DMR, the single-shot version used during the Fall of Reach, and his combat knife, notched and pitted, the record of 25 years of survival on a nearly destroyed planet. His superiors were more than happy to let him use the obsolete weapons and the ammo sitting in warehouses, useless and wasting space. He had proved that he was still as lethal as any other Spartan using the new weaponry. The only known Spartan still living from the Human-Covenant War, that lethality and experience had come with a heavy price.

Dropped off on a ridge half a mile from the disturbance, he ran up the rarely-used dirt road, leading to a homestead demolished several years ago. He sidled around the corner of the ridge carefully, his DMR in his hand. The first thing he noticed was a Covenant spy team clustered around a strange spot. Some Grunts conducted various scientific tests, while an Elite, its back turned to the ridge, kept watch over the group. He quietly slunk over behind the Elite, but before he could pull out his knife, a stick snapped.

The Elite, startled, turned around, roaring. Noble 6 reacted quickly â€" punching the Elite right in the chest. He stumbled backwards, and tripped over a rock. He roared as he fell, "You shall pay for this, Demon!" However, before it could recover its balance, it fell into the spot and its roaring cut off as it disappeared from sight. Noble 6 pulled out his Assault Rifle and cocked it. Before he could fire, the panicked Grunts all leapt into the hole, taking a chance of death rather than certain death at his hands. He knelt to take some readings, but when he pulled out his analyzer, he turned around to check the area, and brushed his toe against the spot. Feeling a strong suction, he resisted, but even his monumental strength was no match for the spot, and he was gradually sucked in.

His analyzer beeped, and the voice of Dr. Halsey rang out. "Noble 6, you're not reading on my scanners, and I don't see your transponder. Please respondâ€¦.. Noble 6? Noble 6? Come in! Do you read me?..." The voice steadily kept on, but faded with the setting sun.

3. The Fateful meeting

Chapter 3 : The Fateful Meeting

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tendency for missions involving possible combat, but all the other Spartans and Special Ops teams are out-system on assignments. I need you to investigate these odd spots of tachyon disturbance on the planet. Also, watch out for Covenant spy teams. I know we're not at war anymore, but they'll be itching for a look at these spots also, and we know that, allies or not, they have spy teams here." and with the grace to look slightly embarrassed, "Just like we haveâ€¦ recon teams in their territory."

Noble 6, armor no longer grey and new, but pitted, blackened and scratched from years of taking on enemies to humanity, saluted. "Yes, ma'am. Consider it done."

On an Eagle, heading to the nearest tachyon disturbance, Noble 6 checked his venerable, but still lethal, weapons. The original Assault Rifle, still in service while waiting for replacements and largely unchanged after 50 years of use, his M6 personal sidearm, the DMR, the single-shot version used during the Fall of Reach, and his combat knife, notched and pitted, the record of 25 years of survival on a nearly destroyed planet. His superiors were more than happy to let him use the obsolete weapons and the ammo sitting in warehouses, useless and wasting space. He had proved that he was still as lethal as any other Spartan using the new weaponry. The only known Spartan still living from the Human-Covenant War, that lethality and experience had come with a heavy price.

Dropped off on a ridge half a mile from the disturbance, he ran up the rarely-used dirt road, leading to a homestead demolished several years ago. He sidled around the corner of the ridge carefully, his DMR in his hand. The first thing he noticed was a Covenant spy team clustered around a strange spot. Some Grunts conducted various scientific tests, while an Elite, its back turned to the ridge, kept watch over the group. He quietly slunk over behind the Elite, but before he could pull out his knife, a stick snapped.

The Elite, startled, turned around, roaring. Noble 6 reacted quickly â€" punching the Elite right in the chest. He stumbled backwards, and tripped over a rock. He roared as he fell, "You shall pay for this, Demon!" However, before it could recover its balance, it fell into the spot and its roaring cut off as it disappeared from sight. Noble 6 pulled out his Assault Rifle and cocked it. Before he could fire, the panicked Grunts all leapt into the hole, taking a chance of death rather than certain death at his hands. He knelt to take some readings, but when he pulled out his analyzer, he turned around to check the area, and brushed his toe against the spot. Feeling a strong suction, he resisted, but even his monumental strength was no match for the spot, and he was gradually sucked in.

His analyzer beeped, and the voice of Dr. Halsey rang out. "Noble 6, you're not reading on my scanners, and I don't see your transponder. Please respondâ€¦.. Noble 6? Noble 6? Come in! Do you read me?..." The voice steadily kept on, but faded with the setting sun.

4. School Pains

Chapter 4: School Pains

_A/N: Hey everyone, Here's chapter 4! I have been posting en masse, but don't expect that to last long. Expect a new chapter every week-2

weeks._

****Earth Prime, E-day+1****

7:35 AM

Chaos reigned. Earth's people had panicked from the Event, and now a rash of disappearances (including one Brennan Theler, who was not much noticed by anyone except the family) had everyone worried to come outside, and to add to that, strange persons and mythical creatures, as well as aliens, had been turning up, not just on amateur video, but on HD video tapes that clearly show a spaceship. This release to the public had everyone wondering what on earth was happening. The answer, as yet unknown to most the inhabitants, was that many of these things were actually from Earth, just not this Earth. Governments of Third World countries and dictatorships began to fall apart, and even the United States struggled under the heavy burden of mass hysteria.

****Toonity, E-day+1****

7:35 AM

"Now here's a backpack and all the textbooks you'll need to finish the day. We took the liberty of signing you up for all the basic classes you'll need to get along as a toon," Babs said. Brennan grumbled,

"Jeez! I can't get away from school, even after being thrown into cartoon world." He picked up the backpack and grunted under the weight. "This is heavy, but I can see why you guys have trouble." Brennan, over the night's course, had grown shorter yet again; his hair had darkened to a dark blue, and now had all his arm and leg hair was a light blue as well. He looked almost as toony as Buster and Babs, and they knew that they needed to hurry. "By the way, just how far is school?" asked Brennan.

Buster said, "Usually just a fade-wipe away." Proceeding to fade-wipe to school, they noticed that Brennan had been left behind. Hurriedly fading back to Buster's burrow, they noticed Brennan standing there confused. "Umâ€¦ you guys just faded out, and you left me standing here. Any reason?"

Babs said, "Apparently, fade-wipes don't work with you yet, so we get to run to school. Better hurry, because school starts at 8:00, and it's 7:45."

Out of breath and panting after a sprint to school, Buster said, "OK, Brennan, the first door to the right and down the stairs will take you to Calamities' Toonizizer. Luckily, we convinced him to build one, who knows how." He snickered. "He really should get out more, he falls for everything nowadays." They rushed down the stairs to see what Brennan thought the creepiest invention ever built. Shaped like a large, fat spider with a chamber on the other side of the room, it portrayed an odd gloom.

He gulped. "I have to get into that?"

Babs said, "Yes, and you had better hurry. First period's about to start!" She shoved him into the chamber, strapped him in, slammed the

door shut, and started pressing buttons on the machine.

"Uh Babsy? Shouldn't we at least read the instructions?" queried Buster.

"Nah we don't have time for that!"

Suddenly, the machine let out a loud beeping noise and the chamber glowed with an unearthly light. Dimly the sound of Brennan screaming could be heard over the beep.

When the machine shut off and the door opened, the obligatory cloud of obscuring smoke rose up, Brennan, unconscious in the chamber, was revealed.

Brennan now had dark blue hair all over his body, except for a light silver stripe over his head and down his back to a long, bushy tail. Buster shook his head. "Oh Babs, I told you not to press buttons! He's gonna have a hard time today."

Babs covered her mouth. "Oops!"

Brennan groggily shook his head and looked up. "Oh man, I feel like I got hit by a lead bar in the face." He tried to walk. "Ooh! And my back! And why do I feel unbalanced?"

Buster said, "Well, Babs here pressed some buttons she probably shouldn't have, but at least you're a toon." Brennan, dreading the answer, asked apprehensively, "What am I? Come on, spit it out, I can take it."

Buster said, "You're the most interestingly colored skunk I've ever seen." Brennan stopped dead. "I'm a skunk. Oh great. I've watched the show, and I know what happens to anything that even vaguely resembles a skunk, and now I'm a real one with no chance of escape. I just hope that I don't start to stink."

Babs said, "We don't have time to mope or discuss things! We've got classes to catch!" Handing Brennan his schedule and a map, she said "Here's the stuff you need, bye, have fun, see you at lunch!" She then dragged Buster away.

Crestfallen, Brennan said into the darkness, "But I don't even know which way this map goes!"

Bugs Bunny looked up from his desk. "Eh, a new toon just entered acme acres. Maybe it's that new student that Babs registered yesterday." He looked down, preparing for the first class of the day.

Holding the map, trying to find his way to Wild Takes 101, Brennan felt hopelessly lost. The school was so big! Finally finding Wild Takes 101, taught by Bugs Bunny, Brennan felt apprehensive as he saw that he was several minutes late. He quietly knocked on the door and waited.

Bugs opened the door and said, "Well hello there! Am I coirrect in assumin' that you are the person that Babs signed up yesterday?"

Brennan quietly replied, "Yes." "Come on in. Seein' as it's your

first day here at the Loo, I believe I can excuse you for bein' late." He walked into the classroom, with Brennan trailing behind. "Listen up class," Bugs said as he rapped a ruler on the chalkboard. "We got us a new student here, and his name isâ€¦ Brennan Theler? Hmm. You're not from around here, are you?"

Brennan quietly replied, "No sir. I'm from Utah."

Bugs sat down at the desk, "Take a seat in the back, and just watch today, because you're new."

Brennan complied and quietly sat in the back of the classroom, desperately taking notes while most of the other toons seemed to be bored, if not downright asleep! This continued for 3 more classes, which Brennan didn't have with any of the toons he knew or recognized.

Brennan was relieved when the bell rang signaling lunch. He walked to lunch, hoping that something edible was being served. Alas, it was Mystery Meatloaf for lunch on Fridays, and sure enough he had the misfortune to be stuck without a lunch on Friday. He sidled up to the nearly nonexistent line, and asked for a lunch. A large, beefy personage (Brennan wasn't quite sure which gender) scooped a large blob of vaguely brownish mush onto his tray. Brennan grabbed as much fruits and vegetables as he could fit onto his tray, and looked around for Babs and Buster. He found them, sitting alone today at a rarely used table (he could tell by the layer of dust on the table), and sat down near them.

Buster grimaced. "So you got stuck with Meatloaf today, eh? Sorry, forgot it was meatloaf day because we always just bring carrots."

Brennan shrugged. "It can't be that bad, right?"

Babs frowned. "Yes it can, Brennan. When Monty ate it one day, he was sick for a week!"

Brennan gulped. He finished off all the fruits and vegetables, but he was still famished. He gingerly poked the meatloaf with his spork. It jiggled like a bowl of Jell-o. He took a small bite, and quickly gulped it down.

Babs stared in shock. "How are you not having seizures already?!"

Brennan said while chewing another bite, "It's not actually that bad. Certainly it's better than taco soup day at my school." Suddenly, Buster noticed the unmistakable purple tail come into view, along with its owner. He tackled Brennan and hid him underneath the table. Brennan, choking on his half-chewed bite of Mystery Meatloaf, asked, "What the heck man? Why are-"

He was shushed by Buster. "Hide and be quiet if you want to live through lunch." Brennan cautiously peeked between the benches, and was shocked to seeâ€¦her.

Fifi la Fume was a purple skunk that immigrated to America as a child. She was smart, athletic, and actually quite attractive, but there were two major problems with Fifi: Any cartoon with a tail and

a white stripe down their back was instantly mistaken for "le skunk-'unk" and jumped on when within sight range, held by a grip of steel that was the downside to her athleticism. Then, whenever she had strong emotions, she started emitting a nauseous cloud that could (literally) peel the paint off the walls and make people black out in seconds. These combined for an interesting fact that she often chased unfortunate toons for several days, and these toons were out of school for weeks after their ordeal, being held in the hospital quarantine room for treatment of stinkiness and fume edemas in the lungs.

Buster sighed, relieved. "She didn't see you. You're lucky she isn't feeling upbeat and optimistic today." Brennan was familiar with her gushy French style onscreen, but nothing had ever been able to make her depressed for more than a few minutes. That she was depressed hinted at something calamitous. "What happened?"

Babs whispered, "Hamton was forced to break up with her. His parents are even more neat-freaks than him, and with her odor and shed hair, his parents threatened to disown him if he didn't break off the relationship, and Hamton loves his parents more than anything and complied with their wishes."

Just then someone screamed, "Look out! The meatloaf's going to blow!" Someone had slipped a stick of dynamite into the meatloaf, and meatloaf was known for its volatility and explosiveness at Acme Loo, often used in traps and science classes related to high explosives. The giant pot swelled, and everyone dove for cover. The lunchperson (still couldn't tell the gender) reverted to their natural form: a lump of cast iron, ensuring their safety. Then the meatloaf exploded, flinging meatloaf everywhere and sending the tables (and the people hiding under them) flying into the walls.

Groaning toons were scattered around the edges of the cafeteria. Due to the amazing recovery abilities of toons, most were up within a minute, sporting nothing more severe than a few scratches and bruises. However, Brennan lay groaning underneath a cafeteria table. Buster and Babs rushed over and dragged him out from underneath the table. Buster looked at Brennan with concern in his eyes. "Looks like we need to get you to the infirmary." He tried to pick Brennan up, but he screamed and blacked out.

Brennan woke up in the infirmary with a casted arm and a boot cast. He had an excruciating pain in his side, and he moaned. The nurse, an old, kindly lady, walked in and her eyes widened when she saw that Brennan was already awake. "Oh dear, I must not have used enough Valium the first time around." Brennan felt a prick in his good arm, and passed out again.

He woke up again, as the nurse bustled in. "Well, you look good enough to go to class now, so just be careful where you walk, because you're going to need this crutch for getting around." She handed him a crutch and a class excusal slip. "You need to hurry if you want to get to the last class of the day!"

He crutched out of the infirmary and down the hallway to the last class of the day: Cartoon Physics 701. He slowly made it down the hallway, but just as the door to the classroom was in sight, Brennan heard a scream. "Ooh la la!" He stumbled when a heavy weight landed on his back, making him wince. The heavy weight in question

exclaimed, "Le skunk 'unk! You are, how you say, mine!" Fifi (for so it was) squeezed him, and he grimaced in pain as he felt the bones in his arm grind together. He sniffed, and an expression of revulsion crossed his face. "What IS that?" Then the full stench hit him in the face like a fist, and he dropped to the ground, briefly unconscious. That ended when both his and Fifi's weight landed squarely on his broken arm.

He screamed and his back spasmed, and as he convulsed, he managed to throw Fifi off (A truly Herculean feat with only one hand). He curled around his arm, tears coursing down his face. He whispered brokenly, "Please just go away."

Fifi rushed towards him, but even as he cringed, Babs held her back. She tactfully said, "Feef, he's not feeling too good right now. Give it a couple hours." Held back, Fifi relented and was led to class. Brennan was helped up by Buster, and he slowly limped to the classroom.

When the lecture started, Brennan was dully disappointed that the lecture was on the basics of real physics that day, which he had already learned. Tired and sore, Brennan fell asleep at his desk, but unfortunately that day, the teacher. Professor Wile E. Coyote, broke the norm of uninterested teachers.

He tapped Brennan, smirking, and as he groggily looked up, Wile asked in a British accent, oddly enough, "What is the force of gravity from the Earth when twenty million kilometres away compared to the force of the Sun if it is one hundred and thirty kilometres away? If you answer the question wrong, a 1,000 page essay on gravity is dueâ€|. " He glanced at the clock. "One hour from now." Brennan, completely flabbergasted and brain blank, looked around for help. He suddenly blanched as he noticed the spot, similar to the one he had fallen into, on the ceiling. Wile noticed his pale face and followed his gaze. "What that? That's been here since first period, and nothing has happened. Hopefully it'll get cleaned up today. Now stop stalling!"

A/N: Hey, please review and tell me what you think.

5. Coming Together

Chapter 5: Coming Together

A/N: Hey everyone! Here's chapter 5, and the end of my en masse updates.

Just so you know, I never held with the crossover crap of "character-meets-character, life-stories-are-explained, everyone-skips-together-into-the-sunset." or "Everyone-sings-Kumbayah-as-best-friends." That's a load of BS, so most of my 'first contacts' aren't going to start well. No skipping into the sunset here.

Chapter 5: Coming Together

****Toonity, E-day+1****

Brennan thought furiously but could come up with no answer. Wile

said, "Time's up!" and dumped a stack of one thousand papers on his desk. "Better start writing!" Brennan groaned, and started scribbling furiously.

Half an hour later, Brennan was sitting back, shaking his sore hand. He thought, _'It's a lot harder to write when I appear to be missing my pinky.'_ Brennan sighed, but before he could get back to work, he glanced up, and realized that the spot now had a large, orange spot growing steadily closer. He stood up, craning his neck to get a closer look, and all the other toons noticed his expression and also glanced up.

The orange spot suddenly landed in the middle of the classroom, crushing several desks as toons dived away. Through a cloud of dust, Wile, irritated said, "I say! Do you mind, we're in the middle of a lesson, chap!" Just then the dust cloud cleared, and everyone abruptly froze, and Brennan stared in shock.

The spot was resolved into a large, orange humanoid with a strange double mandible mouth, and as it stood up it towered over every person in the classroom, (Even Wile, who at 4' 11" was the tallest toon in the school) as it was about seven feet tall. It shook its head, glanced around, glanced up, then did a double take at his surroundings. "What in Altholezen?" it growled. "What manner of insanityâ€" He was cut off as a horde of toon-sized, triangle shaped objects landed on top of it, and were revealed to be a mass of smaller, oddly shaped creatures. One squeaked, "The Demon! It may be coming here!", and then all the other creatures, minus the first, started running in circles, screaming.

The toons, still frozen with shock and fear, slowly backed away from the intruders, and the largest of the lot looked at them. "What manner of insanity are you creatures? You seem to be two-dimensionalâ€" He trailed off. "Gods, I must have hit my head on a rock!" His theory was quickly disproved, as yet another creature dropped from the spot, landing just behind the creature. As it stood up, as yet unnoticed by the largest, it was larger than even the tallest of the others, at nearly 8 feet tall. Just as the first creature began to turn around, it jumped on top of the thing, pressing it to the ground, and methodically proceeded to twist its head. The first stopped struggling after a crack was heard, and lay there, unmoving.

The casual display of death and violence unfroze all the toons. They all rushed out the door, slammed it behind them, and proceeded to empty the local Hammerspace grid, throwing anything and everything at the door to barricade it shut. Brennan watched in disbelief as he watched various objects fly by, most of which should be impossible for the others to hold, let alone throw around.

Then Professor Wile yelled, "Everyone! Utilize von Rabenstrange's Third law of Cartoon physics!" Brennan scratched his head in confusion as all the toons then made a wisecrack, then jumped as a storm of anvils suddenly fell through the tiled ceiling and landed just behind the pile of objects.

Meanwhile, Calamity Coyote pumped his fist in Toon Chases 703. After countless years of trying and failing to catch his partner in comedy, Little Beeper, he finally caught him as Little Beeper had inexplicably not pulled out a large object to crush him, as usual. He

tried to pull out a Hammerspace sign to show his elation (Having chosen to remain silent around others), but found that almost nothing remained in Hammerspace, including signs or anything else that could possibly be used to write on. He scratched his head, and looked a question at Little Beeper. He shrugged, (Being a linguistics and eye-reading expert), then kicked Calamity in the face and sped off farther into the course. Calamity picked himself up and was soon chasing after him.

Noble Six looked up after his elimination of the Elite and saw a squad of Grunts running in circles screaming in their Pidgin English, "Leader dead! Leader dead!" He calmly pulled out his assault rifle and gunned them all down. Only then did he look around to find his position. He noticed he was in some sort of classroom, and the Sun was high overhead. He realized, "I'm in some sort of classroom. Good thing that no one is here. Maybe it's lunch." Just then he heard a loud series of thumps at the door, and the sound of voices, followed by another, louder series of thumps. He shook his head, angry at himself. _"Well, that's just great, there were a bunch of people just outside, and if they didn't see the death of the Elite, they certainly heard the gunshots."_

He took a look at the surroundings, looking for a way out, and while he noted several escape options, he also noticed the strangeness of his surroundings. He thought to himself, _"Is everything here 2D? And why are all the colors so pastel bright?"_ He looked down at himself. _"And I'm still three-dimensional, while this room is two-dimensionalâ€¦.. can't really wrap my mind around that conundrum."_ He decided that escape and safety was more important than location and physics at the moment, so he decided to try the most obvious exit, as well as the one that would provide the easiest escape: the door. Twisting the knob and pushing, he noticed that he couldn't open the door. He employed all his strength, but even his genetically-enhanced muscles and the actuators in his suit could not budge whatever was behind the door. He ripped it off his hinges, only to be confronted with a large, bewilderingly random collection of heavy objects. He thought, _"Who was walking by here? The marching band, football team, all the mechanics students, the deliverymen, and the janitor? What are the odds against them all walking by just as I appear?"_ Not being trained in complex mathematical equations, he shrugged and looked for an alternate avenue of egress.

He walked to the window, only to find that this classroom appeared to be in a large campus building, and it was four stories above an odd garden that appeared to consist of metal spikes placed haphazardly into the ground. Knowing that even with the latest technology, falling forty feet did not exactly ensure that he could walk (or run) away uninjured, and adding to that a collection of sharpened metal stakes, the chances of walking away unhurt dropped to an alarmingly low chance. He looked up in frustration, and was confronted by ceiling tiles simply held in place by thin metal girders. He jumped up, and at the first hit, a ceiling tile broke into several small fragments, and fell to the floor.

Several hits later, and hearing what sounded like police outside the door, he jumped up into the crawlspace, pausing to push several bundles of wires away. Hearing a creak, he surmised that the flimsy aluminum girders installed to hold the ceiling tiles in place would not hold the considerable weight of a half-gearred Spartan for long. He quickly picked a direction and crawled several yards, passing a

series of support bars that he believed to go into the wall at the edge of the classroom. As he went a few yards past the bars, the girders creaked and suddenly collapsed, dumping him in the hallway in front ofâ€¦.. a bunch of large animals wearing clothing? He stopped and stared, wondering exactly what had happened to him.

Brennan let out a sigh of relief as the door was barricaded and the school police, a handful of former mall cops with tasers and sidearms, arrived and began setting up a cordon between the door and the rest of the school. He thought back to his first glimpse of the two creatures, an unshakeable sense of familiarity in his mind. He started as the descriptions came through the fog of fear, and he started to unobtrusively slide away down the corridor, putting as much distance between himself and the cordon as possible.

However, this was cut short when the ceiling just in front of the cordon creaked alarmingly, then broke, dumping the grey creature just to the side of the mall cops. It looked up, but then froze, its sky blue visor facing the toons' way.

The school cops, scared out of their wits, fumbled out their guns, and one stuttered, "P-please c-come with us. You-You're under arrest."

When the grey figure saw the pistols aimed in its direction, it reacted quickly, pulling out a sidearm from a holster on its right thigh; a sidearm much larger and lethal-looking than the school cops' guns that also had a small stain on the barrel. Strangely, this stain was blue. The mall cops gulped and dropped their now-pitiful pistols, and said, "S-sorry, mister." The figure swung around and looked at the group again.

Fifi suddenly took a running leap straight at the creature, Babs crying out, "Feef!"

Noble Six looked away from the odd sight of giant animals when a small group of very short, overweight humans bumbled up, and said, "You-you're under arrest." Turning to them, he was suddenly confronted with drawn sidearms. His combat instincts kicked in, and he whipped out his M6, cocking it on its way up. The mall cops gulped, and dropped their weapons. Satisfied that he was in no danger from them, he holstered his pistol and again turned towards the strange animals. Noticing their odd coloring, he wondered, _"What kind of person dresses up giant animals, and then dyes them outlandish colors?"_

His musing was interrupted when a purple-dyed skunk came flying out of the crowd, towards his helmet. Dimly hearing a pink bunny make some sort of noise, he tried to whip his hands up, but even in SPARTAN Time, he could not bring his hands up fast enough to block the animal. It landed squarely on his visor, uncomfortably close in his HUD, blocking his vision and also clouding his motion sensor.

He reached up to pick it off and set it down, but it pounded on his visor, opened its mouth, and incredibly, began to speak, saying "Vous monstair! Vous cannot point ze weapons at our police!" He blinked, taken aback at this animal, seemingly speaking in an accent reminiscent of Cote d'Azure, and plucked the animal away from his visor. Remembering the psychological "training" (read torture) he was forced to endure so long ago, he looked around for hidden cameras and

speakers. Finding none, he turned his nonplussed gaze back to the animals. Activating his external speakers, he asked, "Alright Mendez, what ***hole did you crawl out of, and why the animals?"

All the toons stared in horror as Fifi landed on the figure's blue visor. It reached up, presumably to knock her off, but she started berating the figure. "Vous monstair! Vous cannot point ze weapons at our police!" This definitely knocked the figure off-balance, as its head came back and it froze for a moment. Then it came back to life, grabbing Fifi by the scruff of her neck and pulling her off its head, looking around, and finally, a crackle was heard, emanating from speakers on the side of its helmet.

A deep, rich voice emanated from within. "Alright Mendez, what ***hole did you crawl out of, and why the animals?"

****Earth 3, E-day+2****

Admiral of the Red Dame Honor Harrington, Duchess of Manticore and Steadholder of Grayson, sighed as she sipped her hot cocoa. Another long day of work, and this was not work on the front lines, but testing weapons prototypes! Sure, these plasma missiles, both capable of the devastation of energy torpedoes on an unprotected target, and the impeller missiles' ability to penetrate sidewalls, could make the current wars, both the known one against the Solarian League and the shadow war against the Mesan Alignment, much easier. But the Star Empire of Manticore's best admiral should be on the battlefield, not doing grunt work in a system only valuable precisely because it held nothing of interest. Nimitz, her telepathic treecat companion, sensed her steadily spiraling downward thoughts, bleeked softly, and dug a claw into her arm.

She was jerked out of her reverie, and prepared to go back to the flag bridge for another long shift of weapons testing, along with her companion ship. As she walked the quarter-kilometre to the flag bridge lift, she finished her cup of hot cocoa and tossed into a waste recycler.

_HMS Retribution, _a pod super-dreadnought of the _Invictus_ class, was one of the largest structures ever built by mankind. At 3 kilometres long, a half-kilometre tall, and a quarter kilometre wide, this starship held enough power to make planets uninhabitable, even without the plasma missiles currently being tested. No single ship could hope to best it, and nothing any other navy not in the Grand Alliance had could scratch it without overwhelming numbers, and even then, they would pay a heavy price for her death.

She walked onto the flag bridge, officers snapping to attention, and said, "Be seated." They all went back to their duty stations, and Honor took the seat at the center of the bridge. She asked her navigation officer, "How are the shake-downs going?"

He answered, "All shipboard systems are nominal, and the plasma missiles, while still having problems integrating with standard missiles, are performing well within their damage estimates on both unpowered drones and impeller drones."

He was interrupted from continuing his report when the sensors officer shouted, "Ma'am! Tachyon disturbance detected, directly in front of us!"

Honor started. Tachyons had only been created in small amounts in artificial conditions, and none had been found naturally. "Scan it!"

"Already completed Ma'am," the sensor officer reported. "Size estimate at 2-3 metres in diameter, as it is a round object that appears to be emitting them." Too late, Honor remembered something. "Helm! Full reverse thrust, emergency military power!" But the impeller wedges and inertial compensators could only decelerate so fast without pulping the vulnerable humans inside, and their best was not good enough.

When HMS Retribution hit the disturbance, in an eye-twisting moment to the cameras of her sister ship, while the ship got no smaller nor the disturbance any larger, the Retribution fit inside, and she, as well as the 4,000 men and women who crewed her, ceased to exist in this universe.

A/N: So the plot thickens! Please review.

Also, I need ideas for OCs that are members in the United States Military in the real world.

Submit a name, age, short description, personality, and appearance by emailing me at Allthingsinheavenandearth .

Also check out my blog for news and the ramblings of me, at .com.

Thanks!

6. Hard Contact

Chapter 6: Hard Contact

A/N: Hey, here's my first introduction to another storyline: remember, this isn't just one story. One Event has the potential to change everything, just as one stone sends ripples throughout the pool. So expect many others to be affected by the events that happen to Younger Me and friends.

Chapter 6: Hard Contact

****Earth Prime, E-Day+1****

First Lieutenant Gary Biggs ran to the armory. His brigade, the 170th Infantry, had been alerted to a worldwide crisis, and weird reports of extraterrestrials and what could only be described as monsters had been verified by several news agencies. Something monumental had happened since that quake, and thousands of people had already been reported missing in Germany. All United States military units had been raised to DEFCON 3, and as a result, the National Guard had been mobilized back home, and all active-duty regiments had to be at a constant state of combat readiness.

His brigade was stationed in Baumholder, a normally quiet town near the border with France and Switzerland. Now the town was a bustling site of military preparation, and all the civilians had been

evacuated to other nearby towns, allowing Baumholder to become the de facto headquarters for United States units stationed in mainland Europe.

The local police department in Veldenz had gotten multiple 911 calls from houses on the outskirts, of strange shadows outside the houses. These calls had cut off from the farthest houses, and the calls were steadily moving inward. There was no response from the cut-off houses, and several platoons were called in to investigate, including one commanded by Gary.

In his command Bradley, Gary leaned back and checked his M9 Berreta and his M16A4, checking that everything was in order. When he finished field stripping, cleaning, and then reassembling his weapons, he climbed up to the commander's position alongside the gunner in the turret of the Bradley. He used the external cameras to look around, noticing a curtain of fog several hundred yards in front of the platoon. He said, "Let me guess. The houses we're being sent to investigate are inside that curtain of fog."

His driver, PFC Adam Flores, nodded. "Got it in one. Not ominous at all."

Gary radioed the other 3 Bradleys in his platoons, saying, "Everyone switch to thermal imaging. That fog's gonna make it impossible to fight visual-only, if push comes to shove." Affirmatives were relayed from the others, and Gary leaned back, putting his eyes back to the periscope and the external cameras. The 4 Bradleys of Platoon Able pierced the fog, the other two platoons, Baker and Charlie, following close behind.

Suddenly the fog cleared, leaving everything bright again, except that it was now overcast in this portion of the town.

"What the-?" asked one of the riflemen, Private Mike Kim, embarked in the passenger section. Gary radioed, "This fog wall is obviously not natural, no fog behaves like that. Everyone, weapons hold." They stopped outside the nearest house to be cut off, and Gary and his platoon, except for the drivers and gunners, disembarked and stood outside.

"Breaching protocol, everyone!" barked Gary, and the point man broke down the door, the others rushing in, yelling, "U.S. Army! U.S. Army!" There was no answer. Activating their flashlights built into the M16s, they spread out, cautiously advancing into the house. One man, upstairs, called out, "Lieutenant? I think you had better see this." Walking upstairs, Gary was confronted with the horrifying sight of a family of four huddled in the master bedroom, near the telephone, obviously dead. Blood splattered the wall behind them, and all had strange burns on their bodies, as well as broken necks. He looked away, sickened, and said, "Get a burial team out here. We have noncombatant casualties, and I have a sneaking suspicion that if we investigate the other homes, we'll just find more of the same."

Suddenly the house shook as one of the groups' 12 Bradleys exploded. The others immediately began evasive maneuvers, and Gary yelled, "Everyone! Take cover, weapons free! Hostiles engaging, inform Command." The other Bradleys, posing attractive targets and unable to see their attackers, retreated several houses back and pulled behind

several homes, another Bradley hit with a red projectile left crippled and smoking in the street. Both of the crew climbed out unharmed, but while running for cover, one was gunned down by smaller, orange projectiles. Gary bit back a curse. "We have casualties! Repeat we have casualties! Two KIA, one WIA."

Throwing a smoke grenade out the window, he waited for the scene to be obscured with thick blue smoke before motioning to two men to grab the wounded man outside. They quickly grabbed him under the arms, and brought him inside, where the platoon corpsman administered to his wounds. He looked up. "Sir, hostiles appear to be using high-explosive incendiary rounds on personnel!" Gary cursed. "What sort of soulless things use incendiary rounds on people?" He suddenly remembered old strategies used in WWII to fool enemy soldiers. "Silent running everyone!" All sound in the house stopped, and Gary could hear the engines of the Bradleys growing slowly silent, as if they were driving away.

After a few, tense minutes of waiting, Gary could see several things crawl out of the bushes several houses down the street. Only around four and a half feet, these diminutive creatures appeared to be like giant insects, carrying weapons. These gathered in a circle about one hundred feet away next to one insect that was slightly larger than the rest. They remained in this position, clicking away and making other strange noises, and after it was obvious they weren't going anywhere, Gary waved up one of his soldiers. He whispered, "Grenade! Pop it into the middle of that circle." The soldier, a nervous private on his second real assignment, quickly popped the pin on one of his grenades and quickly threw it into the circle. Gary cursed. "Kid! You forgot to heat the grenade!"

Lesser Pod leader Thiss K'Trel was conferring with his subordinates on the question of the fleshies with larger transportation, when suddenly, a small metal object bounced into the middle of their circle. Curious, he picked it up and asked, "What is this? Some sort of gift?" Then it exploded.

Gary watched in apprehension as the leader picked up the grenade and clicked some words to the others. Then the grenade exploded, shredding the leader and the others, definitively killing them. Gary pumped his fist. "Hostiles down! We have 6 confirmed KIA." The rookies began to cheer. Gary quickly hushed them. "We don't know how many more there are, so stay quiet for at least another 15 minutes." They all huddled down once again and waited.

After about 5 minutes, another group of 6 popped out of the brush and walked over to the shredded remains of the first group. Gary waved to one of the soldiers at the back door, and he signaled to the Bradleys, "Enemy-ahead. Count-6. Engage-at-will." The Bradleys started up again, and the creatures visibly changed attitudes, pulling out their weapons and aiming at the house the Bradleys were behind.

One of the Bradleys peeked around its cover. The hostiles aimed and fired at it, but their accuracy was horrible and the bullets that hit sparked off the Bradley's steel and aluminum armor, incurring only a few scratches. The 25 mm cannon barked, and one of the aliens blew apart in a shower of gore. The others flinched, and the M240 heavy machine gun spat lead that quickly tore the others apart.

After another tense 15 minutes passed, Gary yelled, "Mount up! We're getting out of here before another patrol shows up!" The remaining soldiers quickly embarked into their Bradleys. The compartments were all standing-room only, as the effective loss of 2 Bradleys, with only 2 KIA, left a lot of soldiers without transportation, and the remaining vehicles had to squeeze them in. As the Bradleys rumbled back to base, Gary totaled up what he had gathered about these new threats. High-Explosive Incendiary rounds in their weapons, as well as some sort of weapon that shot red projectiles and was capable of turning armor into wrecks, while leaving the crew relatively safe, unless a critical system was hit.

They traveled in apparent small groups of 12 as the smallest unit, they carried no body armor, and the leaders were easy to pick out. They were insectoid, with 6 legs, an outer carapace, and compound eyes. They murdered civilians and noncombatants brutally and without mercy.

Gary grimly started writing up a report to Command. They were going to want all the data they could gather on these new, obviously hostile, aliens, and Gary had a sneaking suspicion that the United States would not long stay on DEFCON 3, if incidents like this kept occurring.

****Earth 2, E-Day+1****

Master Chief Petty Officer SPARTAN John-117, better known as the Master Chief, sat down on the gently protesting bed and sighed as he removed his helmet. The UNSC Infinity had been through hell. The once-great compliment of 14,000 of the UNSC's best men and women had been reduced to a grimy, tired, mob of less than 9,000. The Elite ship that had found them, the Justice's Sentence, had also suffered heavy casualties, and the engines and Slipspace drive of the Infinity had been disabled, requiring the Justice to tow them into Slipspace.

While he felt regret over the thousands he was not able to save, the casualty rate was not the highest he had seen in his 34 years of service, not by far. He remembered in particular the battle on Installation 04, where he and about 20 others had been the only survivors, out of a crew of 2,000 sailors and marines. He felt even more regret for the 85 remaining SPARTAN-IVs. 15 of their number had been left behind on the Forerunner Shield World, and their innocence, preserved even through their training, had been lost the second they entered real combat for the first time. He regretted that others had to go through what he did.

However, he felt a new, disturbing emotion welling deep within him, relating to the one loss that hurt the UNSC, and him, the most. Depression. He opened the bottom drawer in his chest-of-drawers and removed one small object, the only thing in the drawer. It was a small, dully glowing chip.

Cortana had finally succumbed to the disease all Smart AIs did: rampancy. While in any other circumstance, the way and manner in which she finally manifested this would have been an annoyance at worst. However, while the UNSC Infinity sat on the ground on that dangerous deathtrap of a world, it turned into a nightmare.

Fascinated by the numerous Forerunner artifacts, and the one Precursor artifact uncovered, she wasâ€¦. unhappy, to say the least, when the Infinity attempted to leave. She easily hacked into the ships' systems, and grounded all the engines until she had finished studying the artifacts. However, in that process, 2 SPARTAN-IVs, 100 crewman, and 50 Elites had lost their lives protecting the ship from Forerunner constructs and the Covenant Loyalists, and one Loyalist Spec-Ops team had managed to infiltrate the ship and disable the Slipspace drive.

He had worked so long with Cortana, been through the fires of Installation 04, the Battle of Earth, and the Ark. He had relied on her here to survive, and then she had fallen into rampancy, caused the deaths of people he had sworn to protect. He missed her guidance, her quick thinking, and her company on the often-lonely battlefield.

She had been deemed a threat (rightly so) and had been subjected to a process that had been invented during his long absence: AI Hibernation. All her code had been frozen at the very moment of the process, rendering her inactive until a cure could be found for rampancy. Her chip still had to be kept away from interface sockets, as any interference could break the hibernation.

But he was now without any friends in the world, no one to keep him company. As far as he knew, all his fellow SPARTAN-IIIs were dead, Johnson had died on the Ark, and the only other two people with which he had any sort of close relationship were months away. He had no one that could relate to him, no one who had been through the same things as he had. They were all dead.

He sighed again, but his enhanced hearing picked up the sound of footsteps in the hallway. Quickly secreting all his emotions behind his mental wall, he picked up his helmet, checked it, and sealed onto his head in one movement.

To Captain Andrew Del Rio, all he saw as he walked in the door was a green blur.

Master Chief saluted. "Sir!"

Captain Del Rio said, "We've salvaged everything we could from the Dawn. We're going to send her off into slipspace, and we'd like you to do the honors. Please, come along to the bridge." He walked briskly away, John leisurely strolling along behind him.

When they arrived on the bridge, the room was a bustling hive of activity, ensigns and officers rushing about, checking that none of the hasty repairs had come undone. There were still plasma burns on one wall, where the bridge crew had fought off a platoon of Covenant Loyalists. Jury-rigged wires, replacement consoles, and new deck plating gave the bridge a ramshackle look, but looks were deceiving. This was the nerve center of the ship, and as such, only the best of the ship's personnel were allowed to work in here.

One ensign reported, "Sir, we've got the Dawn rigged for release. I rigged up the initiation to this button here," pointing to a small, glowing green button. "Press it whenever you're ready, Chief." Most of the people were expecting a short pause, even from a Spartan, but John simply pushed the button and turned away, stomping (He couldn't

really do anything else, for the carpet had not yet been replaced) back to his rooms.

The sensors officer reported, "Captain, the Dawn disappeared inside our sensor range." The captain waved it off. "We've taken a lot of damage in the past month, Lieutenant. Get someone out to check out our communications array as soon as we drop out of Slipspace." The lieutenant saluted. "Yes sir!"

The communications officer handed a sheet to Captain Del Rio. "The Justice is reporting a Slipspace anomaly ahead of their position. We'll be slowing to investigate. Here's what their sensors have gathered on the anomaly so far." Reading the sheet of paper, Del Rio sighed. This anomaly was only 1 meter in diameter, hardly qualifying it as an anomaly, but the Elites had deemed it important enough to stop near it. Sure, it was emitting tachyons, which was rare for such a small object, but the Forerunners had so many constructions that emitted tachyons, they weren't anything special. He noticed the inertia of the ships slowing down.

The Justice's Sentence was one of the newest ships built by the Covenant Separatists, and was one of the most accurate and powerful ships ever created, a supercarrier. One of the few with new-era plasma weapons, it was also equipped with a MAC gun- equal to that of a UNSC Frigate. While this seemed pitiful compared to the Super MAC 1.5, and the 3 Heavy MACs employed by the Infinity, this ship was nearly the Infinity's equal. It was accurate in distances to within 100 meters, a miniscule amount in the vastness of a solar system.

But in this case, 100 meters was only too large of a margin, as the Justice slowed directly ahead of the anomaly, to conduct close-range scans. But the forward comms array, an arrangement of antennae ahead of the ship, contacted the anomaly by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. This amount was truly infinitesimal, but the odd pull of this anomaly soon sucked the Justice in. The only thing its Shipmaster could do before being pulled in was to sever the cord connecting the Justice to the Infinity.

The sensors officer's panel blared a warning, and the ensign reacted quickly. He yelled out, "Captain! The Justice has disappeared!"

Captain Del Rio was flabbergasted. "Any sign of debris? The ship couldn't have just disappeared!"

The ensign said apologetically, "That's exactly what appears to have happened, sir."

Captain Del Rio thought for a moment, then said, "Any cameras focused on the Justice when she disappeared?"

Tapping at his console, the ensign said, "Yes, sir. Camera 58A."

"Put it onscreen."

The holotank started, fizzling into life to show the familiar silhouette of a Covenant ship. One moment it was there, the next, an eye-bending show of a violation of physics occurred as the 29 km long

supercarrier fit inside the 1-meter hole without either object changing size.

Several officers were vomiting on the floor, and even the captain looked faintly green. The AI asked, "Replay?"

He said, "No, don't replay it. Maintenance, send a cleaning team up to the bridge." He turned away, and after a few seconds, turned around, once again composed. "Sensors, what just happened?"

The sensors officer replied, "No idea, sir. However, sensors indicate a region of space on the other side of the anomaly, and my only hypothesis is that it's some sort of Forerunner or Precursor teleportation device. My sensors are detecting the _Justice_ on the other side, but its condition is unknown. Recommendation is that we proceed into anomaly and render assistance."

Captain Del Rios nodded. "Alright, it's not like we have any other options, unless you all fancy becoming a generation ship back to Earth?" The other officers all shook their heads. "Helm, take us in."

As the _Infinity_ went through the portal, all the people on board felt an intense feeling of pain, followed by terror as the power went out, leaving the spaceship drifting helplessly in space. Everyone could feel the graveyard the _Infinity_ was becoming as the air and heat began to run out.

****Toonity, E-day+2****

"Alright Mendez, what _maulk_-hole did you crawl out of, and why the animals?", the grey figure asked.

All the toons stared in terror (except for Brennan, who was slowly and sneakily crutching down the hallway), frozen in fear.

The grey figure, still holding Fifi up by the scruff of her neck, looked up at the ceiling, and then laughed. "If you really want me to believe this crap, you should probably get a refresher on how to make things believable. You really have gotten rusty since you disappeared to wherever you went."

Buster asked timidly, "Who are you talking to?" He cringed as the figure's head snapped around unnaturally fast, it's visor pointing right at him. Babs added, "And could you let Fifi down?" The figure ignored her request, still looking right at Buster.

Noble 6 laughed. "If you really want me to believe this crap, you should probably get a refresher on how to make things believable. You really have gotten rusty since you disappeared to wherever you went."

He waited for a reply, but his only answer was the blue rabbit opening its mouth and asking in a New Jersey accent, "Who are you talking to?" He whipped his head around to face him.

_New Jerseyâ€¦|. He remembered New Jersey. He remembered it only too well. Bullied and beaten even as a 5-year old; the alleys where he lay, bleeding and bruised. The long, painful crawl home, to his run-down tenement, too small for his 7-person family. Then, on a

routine business trip to Sigma Octanus, his parents' ship was attacked by a Covenant corvette and destroyed with no survivors._

Living in orphanages and foster homes, each one more dilapidated and run-down than the last. The hard work in the orphanages, and the beatings. Oh, still the beatings, for being different. The abusive foster parents, taking him in only for the tax breaks. The starvation diets, scrounging in the garbage behind the school to get enough food to continue living another miserable day.

And then Halsey came. Offering him a new life, a chance at revenge against the Covenant, and power. The power to never be beaten again, to never have to be afraid of anyone or anything.

As he was locked in those memories' grips, he was shaken out of it by the pink rabbit asking, "Could you let Fifi down, please?" He looked to the pink bunny, suddenly remembering the purple skunk he still held by the scruff of its neck. He dropped it, warning, "Don't move." The pink bunny rushed over to the skunk, crying out "Feef! Are you all right?" The purple skunk got up, groaning, and said "Oui."

Disregarding this, the pink bunny immediately proceeded to prod the purple skunk for injury.

As Noble 6 continued to watch these animals carefully, he was struck by the way the pink bunny knew exactly where to prod for the most likely injuries. This was impossible for real animals to do, and he knew this was even beyond Medez' near-demonic abilities as deception.

As he thought on this, he realized, _'There may just be a chance that these animals really are a new species, and this isn't some trickery.'_

Let's see, standard first contact procedure for diplomats: First Contact package, followed by translation for diplomatic relations if at all possible. Well, that's screwed, so standard Spartan procedure. Not to mention that these humans know and are protecting these species, so this may be yet another thing hidden by ONI. Need to find new information as well.'

He needed 4 of these new animals for this to work. He already had two right next to him, so two more to go. He motioned to the blue bunny "Come here." The blue bunny was pushed forward by all the rest of the animals, and it nervously crept forward, hiding behind the other two animals. 3 down, 1 to go.

Noble 6 needed one more suitable hostage. He scanned the crowd, but the only person standing out was a green mallard that even from here, screamed "Sleazy! Greedy!" He cast his eyes about, his eyes falling on the mall cops. Too large, those cops were so obese there was no chance of even a Spartan slinging them over a shoulder and making a quick escape. Last, he saw a blue skunk with an odd silver stripe slowly inching down the hallway, wearing a cast on one arm and leg, using a crutch.

He pointed at the blue skunk. "You there, come over here." The blue skunk, already looking more scared, if that was possible, than the

others, responded by quickly crutching in the opposite direction. Noble 6 sighed. '_So the (slightly) harder way it was.' _He looked at the other 3 beside him, and said, "Don't move."

He suddenly took two gigantic strides and leapt right over the startled animals, landing in a roll beyond them, standing up, and grabbing the blue skunk by the undamaged arm. Heaving him over one shoulder, he casually strode through the petrified animals back to his other 3 hostages.

Suddenly, a blinding light made everyone in the vicinity close their eyes, and when they opened their eyes again, five folded slips of paper gradually drifted right into Noble 6's and the four toons' hands.

Almost as one, they opened the folded slips of paper, and read them. Everyone had the exact same message, in an elegant cursive handwriting.

It read, '_You have been chosen. Prepare yourselves.' _

A/N: Well, the plot thickens! Two more storylines, Noble 6 being a orphan from New Jersey, and the mysterious paper slips.

_ Chapter 7, which will be up by Halloween, will be called Revelations._

_Also, still looking for OCs for my Earth Prime-centric storyline. Just drop me an email at __Allthingsinheavenandearth __._

_Don't forget to check out my blog at __.com__ for updates on the story, drawings by me and others, and the Ramblings of Me._

Thanks,

Billybobjoe47s

7. Revelations

A/N: Hey everyone! Sorry for being late, but Halo 4 came out, and so I decided to wait and finish the campaign to get more elements of the story, and then life hung me up on the publishing of the story, but on the upside, this chapter is nearly 3500 words long! So enjoy, and Chapter 8 will be coming soon. However, a set due date will not be proclaimed, because life is just the way it is.

Also, this story is now officially AU, because Halo 4 has been released.

_Some errors in names have been pointed out, and Fifi le fume's name will accordingly be changed sometime between now and Chapter 8 to the correct spelling, Fifi la Fume. Andrew Del Rios is really Andrew Del Rio, but after watching his meager performance in Halo 4, I feel impressed to keep this AU and make him a slightly different, much more effective leader. _

_Also, in this timeline, Cortana and the Master Chief were stranded in space for a much longer time than in canon, but Cortana staved off

rampancy by going into a 'sleep mode', slowing down her degradation._

Please, please, PLEASE review! Though the views and reads are nice, please show your appreciation by favoriting, following, or reviewing the story, because it makes me feel less worthless.

_Sorry for the long A/N, but in the ensuing months, (hopefully before 2013 rolls around) I will be publishing a prequel of sorts to the universe, entitled, 'Plains of Ash and Fields of Glass'. Feel free to guess what it is about!
>

Now onto the story!

Thanks,

Billybobjoe47s

Chapter 7: Revelations

****Toonity, E-Day+1****

"What the _grapp_?" Noble 6 voiced. The other people shared his confusion, though they were not quite as vocal about it. He turned the paper over, looking for anything else, but to his frustration, that was all the paper held. "Which one of you did this?" he asked, looking at both groups of animals. They all shrugged, a gesture that Noble 6 found disturbingly human. "Well than who did?"

Another bright flash of light blinded them, and 5 more slips of paper landed in the groups' hands. They read, _'Do not question, but believe. You are all about to be tested. The journey ahead will be long. Check Hammerspace, Brennan.'_

Noble 6 looked around, looking to see which one was named Brennan, and the injured blue skunk looked behind himself, muttering, "But I can't use Hammerspace! I'm not evenâ€¦" But his voice trailed off as he finished turning around and stopped talking. He turned around, and in his paws were additional clothing to what he already wore, and a strange, data-pad like device.

Both Noble 6 and Brennan blinked. "What the _grapp_?" "Where'd that come from?"

The data pad lit up, and a cheerful voice announced, "Greetings! I am the Multiverse Traveler version 4.1.3. Please hold still, as I attempt to determine your universe of origin." A bright green light popped out and swept over the 5, as well as the mall cops and the rest of the toons.

This was the straw that broke the camel's back, and all the other toons and the mall cops ran screaming in the other direction, as far away from these strange events as possible.

The data pad blinked. "Universe origins determined. You-"it said, a laser pointing right at Noble 6, "Are a denizen of C-02, of the species human, gender male, but extensive genetic and other augmentations detected." The laser moved to Buster. "You are a denizen of T-01, speciesâ€¦ undifulate energy, both normal and

dark, form Lagomorph, gender male, but with unusual sentient characteristics, further research required." It moved to Babs. "Also a denizen of T-01, species undifulate energy, both normal and dark, form Lagomorph, gender female, but with unusual sentient characteristics, much like subject Two." The laser then pointed at Fifi. "Denizen of T-01, species undifulate energy, both normal and dark, form Mustelid, gender female, but with unusual sentient characteristics. Further research into T-01 needed, as significant change detected since last Multiverse survey." The laser finally pointed at Brennan. "Denizen of T-01â€¦. Correction, tachyon frequency analysis indicates C-01. Form Mustelidâ€¦. Correction, free radical damage analysis indicates former human status, research required as to transformation. Universe and species analysis indicate Successor status, scanning for genetic markersâ€¦found. Current form Mustelid, gender male. Injuries detected, including bruising, a simple fracture of the ulna and an avulsion fracture of the fifth metatarsal. Beginning Infraradio wave healing treatment. Greetings, Successor. Scan completed. How may I assist you?"

Brennan was stunned into silence. The data pad blinked. "Oh dear. Perhaps you do not speak English." It launched into a volley of other languages, and Brennan could recognize German, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, and even Latin. "No response detected. Brainwave analysis indicates stunned disbelief, and thought wave patterns indicate English as spoken language."

Brennan found his voice. "My name isn't Successor, umâ€¦. thing."

The pad flashed blue. "I know this fact. Successor is the term given to humans from C-01, as you have inherited my creators' former position as those most likely to form a Multi-dimensional government."

Brennan asked, "Umâ€¦. Okâ€¦" and cast about for something else to say. "What are their names?" he said, pointing to the other 4 members of the small group huddled around the device.

The pad beeped, then said, "Please do not think about your name. Scanningâ€¦. Excellent all subjects think in English thought patterns. Analyzing first layer coherent patternsâ€¦. Subject 4, please make an effort to continue to think in Englishâ€¦. Complete. Successor, would you like me to determine your name as well?"

Brennan said, "Sure."

The pad beeped again. "Complete. Would you like me to verbally speak, or project directly into your mind, Successor?"

Brennan looked very uncomfortable at the idea of having a machine projecting into his head, and said hastily, "No, just speak."

The machine said, "Understood. Subject 1," again pointing with its laser, "Has forgotten his name, oddly, although I have come up with a common moniker, Noble 6." Noble 6 started at its casual mention of his highly-classified code name, and stared at the pad again. Oblivious to this, the pad continued, "Subject 2's name is Buster Bunny, an interesting moniker seeing as how his form appears to be that of a rabbit."

Buster scratched his head. "Well, that's really one of the two ways you name a toon, and I didn't have anyâ€| distinguishing characteristics like Fifi did at birth."

The pad ignored him and continued, "Subject 3's name is Babs Bunny, also an interesting moniker, same reasons as Subject 2."

"Subject 4's name is Fifi la Fume. Nothing more to say at the moment."

"Your name, Successor, is Brennan K. Theler. How may I serve you now?"

Noble 6 broke in. "How the _maulk_ do you know that? My code name is level-3 clearance!"

The pad said, "Simple. By asking you not to think of your name, you unconsciously thought of your name, and all I had to do was read the brainwave patterns on the uppermost layer of your mind and translate into English."

Noble 6 growled. "No one is allowed to know that name. I'm afraid you'll all have to disappear." He reached for the pad, but it made a tsking sound. "I wouldn't try that, Noble 6. That is not highly recommended." Noble 6 ignored it and when his hand was 3 inches away, the pad extended an antenna and shot a blindingly bright bolt of electricity at Noble 6. His shields quickly flashed out, and he was knocked back a step. He quickly tried to grab it a second time, but the pad shocked him again, and he fell heavily to one knee, cracking the linoleum tiling on the floor.

As Noble 6 struggled to not black out, he stayed on one knee, greyed out and struggling to remain conscious. The others finally got their first good look at him. Dressed in a heavy, bulky grey armor, he was incredibly imposing to the 4-foot tall toons. His visor, colored a dark grey, was a mere slit in his helmet, and there was not a single inch of skin exposed, as anything not covered by the grey armor was encased in a black bodysuit. The armor was pitted and scarred, and that was not the full extent of the damage, for carved into each of his shoulder pads and rerebraces was a roman numeral, I, II, IV, and V. On the hand planted in the ground was a slightly larger numeral: III. The other hand was bare.

On one thigh was the rather large pistol. The toons all noticed something they had missed the first time around, which was that the butt of the weapon had a roman numeral II carved into it. On the other thigh was a blue, horseshoe-shaped weapon. On his back were two weapons, painted jet black. The only visible differences were that one had a longer barrel and scope. Around his waist was a variety of spherical devices, some with the obvious shapes of grenades and others simple blue spheres. On one side of his chest piece, an imposing, rather large, curved knife hung upside down in its sheath, positioned for easy drawing. Its' handle had the Roman numeral IV carved on it.

He recovered and stood up again, once more towering over the others. He shook his hand out, and backed a few steps away from the pad. It said, "Good decision, Noble 6. I would not like to have to shock you again. I must congratulate you on your resilience. Most other beings

would succumb to complete syncope within a few seconds of the first application, yet you resisted two applications without falling farther than presyncope. Duly note, however, that another attempt will result in a much stronger application."

It continued, "Given that this Party has suffered what appears to be moderate mental trauma, as well as" "it pointed with its laser to Brennan and Noble 6, "moderate to severe physical trauma, I recommend retiring to a place of rest for the remainder of the day and night. Do any of you have a suitable dwelling?"

Brennan replied, "I don't really live here, so count me out." Babs said, "I have over 20 siblings living in my house, there's no way I'm letting that thing in with so many children." Fifi said, "Moi house is very modest, and there would not be any room for vous to stay, unless vous fancy staying in le city dump?" However, she winked at Brennan. "Unless vous would like to come over?"

He backpedaled quickly. "Um" "I already made arrangements with Buster in case it was needed, so thanks, but no thanks." He glanced at Buster, visibly sweating. He winked, and then said. "That's right Brennan, I got it covered." Brennan blew an inaudible sigh of relief, which was quickly silenced when Fifi said, "Well, than moi will have to come over to Bustair's house!" Buster tried to stop that wave, but was quickly swamped when Babs gushed, "Ohmygosh a sleepover!" She and Fifi joined hands and danced in a circle. "A sleepover! We'll have so much fun!" they squealed, and Buster simply gave in, knowing he was no match for that kind of enthusiasm. He shot Brennan a glare for his help with this predicament, even indirectly.

The pad said, "Then it is decided. Sucessor, it would be best to stow away these objects in Hammerspace until such time as they shall be needed." It directed its attention to Noble 6. "I know you are discomfited with this situation, but your particular area of expertise will be sorely needed on this quest." They all blinked. "Quest?" "What?" But the pad had turned itself off and lay inactive in Brennan's palms. He turned around again, and when he had faced forwards again, all the clothing and the pad were gone.

Noble 6 blinked again. He thought, '_How the _maulk_ does he fit all those things in his back pockets so fast, or even at all? And what is this Hammerspace that that note and the Traveler were talking about?_' He sighed, and seeing no alternative, internally acquiesced to the pad's request to follow these small, strange beings to the blue ones' home.

They walked out the kitchen door; totally (and accidentally) avoiding the police barricade set up on the street next to the front entrance, and began to climb the hill to Buster's house. As they walked, Brennan suddenly and acutely became aware that Fifi was sidling uncomfortably close to him. He slowly tried to distance himself by walking to the shoulder of the small trail, but she followed, and he gave up when he nearly fell off the narrow shoulder into the forest. He steadfastly tried to ignore her, but she got very uncomfortably close, so close that he could feel her breathing down his neck from behind. He started speedcrutching, trying to put feet between himself and Fifi, but she kept pace with him, and he finally turned around and asked, "What do you want? And could you please move a little bit farther away? You're creeping me out."

His eyes suddenly widened as he finally realized that he was face-to-face with her, but before he could try to turn away, she latched onto his arm. He tried to pull away, but she had a grip of steel, and no matter how hard he pulled, her grip loosened not one bit. He dropped the crutches, but he was still held fast.

Fifi started kissing his arm. Brennan made a choked gurgling noise, and his eyes rolled up into the back of his head for several seconds. He panicked and tried running, but all for no avail. Frantic, he caught Busters' eye as he continued down the road and mouthed repeatedly, 'Help!' Buster just smirked and turned away, still angry at being indirectly forced by Brennan to host others at his home.

Fifi suddenly jumped on his head and wrapped her tail around his face. Panicking and blind, he stumbled around in circles for several seconds, unable to breathe. Stumbling around blind, he soon fell off the shoulder into the forest, and emitted a panicked grunt as he felt himself falling, strangely with no pain from his broken bones.

That worry, however, stopped quickly as soon as he realized he was still blind and unable to breathe. He fumbled his way upright and ran off towards what he thought was the road, but was in reality, the woods. The others stopped and watched as he ran clumsily into the forest, getting pummeled by branches and slowly suffocating.

Soon he faded from view, and then they could hear rapid, frantic screaming that gradually faded into the distance: "Get her off! Get her off! Get her off!"

Babs said, concerned, "Shouldn't we go find him and Feef?"

Buster just smiled and said casually, "He'll find his way back to my house in a few hours, once he escapes."

Six hours later, Buster's smile had long since faded into a concerned frown. The sun had just gone down, and the last vestiges of light were fading from the sky. He finally made the decision to go looking for Brennan, but just as he pulled a flashlight from Hammerspace and took the first step, the object of his concern came lurching out of the forest.

Covered in scratches and bruises, fur matted and torn, and twitching spasmodically, Brennan made a horrendous sight. In some places, entire sections of fur had been torn out, leaving small bald spots.

Brennan slowly limped into full view, with Fifi now attached to his leg. Dragging that leg behind and limping in jerks towards Buster, he muttered the same three words over and over. "Get her off, get her off, get her off!" His voice was almost entirely gone, and he soon started shivering.

Buster rushed towards him. "Oh my gosh! Are you all right?" His question was met with silence, as Brennan continued to slowly limp closer.

Buster escorted him to the entrance of the burrow, and Babs came out, yawning, "Has Brennan gotten back yet?"

Seeing Brennan, she gasped. "Oh! You look horrible! Come inside, grab some hot cocoa." She noticed Fifi. "Get off him, you've been chasing him for six hours now, and look at him!"

Fifi climbed off and remembered the fact that there was a sleepover planned for tonight. "Oh, I am so sorry Babs, we were planning to have the, how you say, pillow fight tonight, no?" She waved back to Brennan. "Have a good night's sleep, no?"

He shuddered, and Fifi and Babs disappeared into the hollow, to brutalize some of Buster's innocent cushions.

Soon, Buster had retired to his room to get a night's worth of sleep, as nothing could be done for Brennan in his current state. Fifi and Babs were hidden somewhere in the labyrinthine depths of the rabbit tunnel shortcuts underneath Buster's house. Noble 6 sat on the floor in the kitchen, silent and unmoving in his vigil, and he was so still that it was impossible to tell if he was sleeping or awake.

Brennan however, lay in fetal position in the living room behind the couch, all the lights on, rocking slowly and slightly side to side, almost catatonic. Above the muffled noises of the house, one could faintly hear a mantra belabored, slowly and softly, repeating until the sun came up.

"Get her off, get her off, get her offâ€¦!"

****R-1, E-day+2****

Lesser Swarm Leader Prekt C'fan clicked in annoyance. Lesser Pod Leader Thiss K'trel had not sent a messenger for nearly a day-night through the world-hole, and this led it to the inevitable conclusion that some of the new, tasty fleshies had somehow overwhelmed him. This led to its obvious incompetence, as no Rak'te would allow a fleshy to overwhelm it.

_ However, the new fleshies were tasty, and the reports of larger, bigger roar-crawlers were concerning. If these fleshies were under the protection of others, much like the Old Enemies, then a war would be unavoidable and war on two fronts was undesirable._

_ It made the decision to send in the land-crawlers, as a quick crushing of the opposition would lead to many nights of feasting off the meat of the New Fleshies._

_ It also made the decision to send a courier ship-past-breath to the nearest Greater Swarm Leader. If the New Enemies were just as tenacious and insane as the Old Enemies, than more reinforcements would be economical for a quick victory._

He called for a courier, gave it its orders, and watched it run over to the nearest ship-past-breath tower, to deliver the latest news to the Greater Swarm.

****Heltus, E-day+2****

Lucifer grinned evilly. His scientists had just finished their study of the quake, and it appeared that it caused holes between universes, making Plan Epsilon much easier.

He called up the leader of the Infiltrators, Beelzebub. "It's time. Find me a hole to Earth Prime, and then send in as many Infiltrators as you have.

"Plan Epsilon is beginning."

****Earth 4, E-day+2****

Captain Del Rios sighed in relief as the lights came back on. It had been 3 hours since they went through the object, and unprepared for power surges, they had been helpless as the power went out and the ships' AI, Athena, was trapped inside the AI Core, unable to help. As the oxygen slowly ran out, crewmembers had to reset every breaker, trip every switch, and replace shorted components by hand, with no robotic or computer help to speed the process. There had been only 2 hours of oxygen left before the crew started to die from asphyxiation.

As he stood up out of his seat to stretch, the sensors officer reported, "Sir! Sensors are back online. The _Justice_ has also recently restored power, and we appear to be in an inhabited star system, as strong radio waves are emanating from the 2nd planet from the sun, and sensors are detecting several large colonies on the planets' surface. Also, we're picking up some strange gravitational readings, but the sensors could be just fluctuating while they try to recalibrate."

Captain Del Rios thought, _'Maulk_. A First Contact scenario, but we have two very large ships looming menacingly above their planet.'_

The sensors officer suddenly started. "Sir! We have nearly 2 dozen extremely strong artificial gravitational signals, along with a field in the middle that matchesâ€¦ Forerunner Flood research centers, on the other side of the outer system."

Captain Del Rios swore and pounded his chair. "_grapp_! How much does this ship have to go through? Requiem, Covenant Loyalists, that anomaly, possible First Contact with only two gargantuan warships, and now possibly the Hood Protocol? This mission almost seems cursed from the beginning." He flipped on the ship-wide intercom. "Listen up, ladies and gentlemen, we have a _maulk_ of a situation here. The anomaly has dropped us into an inhabited star system of an unknown species. But that's not all. We have a possible Forerunner Flood research installation being researched by this species, and so I am declaring Hood Protocol. I repeat, Hood Protocol. As of now, this ship is on high alert, and I am activating external gravity fields to allow for speedy repairs. Del Rios out."

He activated a commlink to the _Justice_. Its shipmaster, K'tel Thar, answered. "What is it, human?" he asked in a gruff, deep voice.

Captain Del Rios evenly said. "Scans show a possible Flood research installation in possession of the natives. I am declaring the Hood Protocol. Prepare yourself for battle, and make best speed with the _Infinity_ to the installation."

Shipmaster Thar reared back, mandibles flaring, and growled, "The Parasite returns. Fear not human, we will burn that installation and

any who oppose us to ash."

Captain Del Rios nodded. "Good. I recommend activating external gravity fields to expedite repairs. Del Rios out." He sat down and waited as the ships crawled across Newtonian space to the object on the other side of the solar system, while crews worked furiously to repair the damage done by micrometeorites and solar wind to the vulnerable reflective coating on the outside of the _Infinity _and the _Justice _while the particle shields fell silent.

8. Collision Course

Chapter 8: Collision Course

A/N: Apologies for the long wait, but this chapter will be worth it at a whopping 10,000 words! Also, the second chapter of my Halo story, Plains of Ash and Fields of Glass is out, as well as the first chapter of a co-op with Marytana, the Elmyra Incident Files.

Merry Christmas!

Oh yes, a new Fanfic by my good friend the Nortamrican, will be up on my profile hopefully before New Years' Day.

So enjoy!

Chapter 8: Collision Course

****Earth 4, E-day+2****

Captain Del Rios yawned and sipped his tea as he strode up to the bridge. Even crawling slowly across space in stealth mode, the _Infinity _and the _Justice _were bound to be close to the Forerunner Installation.

As he settled back into the high-backed captain's chair, he ordered, "Status report."

The officer on watch reported, "All systems are green, and the MAC guns and backup capacitors are charging as we speak. Pelicans have been prepped for a boarding operation if all else fails, and Gypsy Team and the Chief are about to be alerted."

Del Rios nodded and glanced at the holoscreen. It showed that the _Infinity_ was about half an hour away from the gravity wells, with the _Justice _one minute behind them.

He barked, "Send a radio first-contact package to the Installation, get a high-intensity sensor scan on the gravity wells, and take us to Battle Stations."

The klaxon blared, and all over the ship, men and women rushed to combat stations, excepting a team of 5 SPARTANS. They calmly walked to a pair of pelicans, one with a NOVA attached to the back. They boarded while checking their weapons.

The communications officer soon said, "We'll be able to tell whether they responded soon, sir." One minute later, and after no reply, Captain Del Rios sighed. "Section 2 it is."

Earlier, Communications Ensign Lukas Greenburg had picked up a strange signal emanating from an empty patch of space. Intrigued, he tuned in, but heard nothing but a multitude of long and short blips.

He shrugged and turned back, preparing for the first transit of the day aboard Lynx Wormhole Defense Force OB-3. Little did he know, but this was binary for translating the English language.

The sensor alarm blared. The sensor officer checked the results of the high-intensity scan and blanched. "Sir! Those aren't gravity walls, they're armed space stations. I'm seeing a multitude of missile tubes and energy projectors, and those gravimetric distortions are some sort of gravity shield.

Anything physical less than a MAC isn't going to make it through, and normal lasers are going to be bended like pretzels, so the chance of a hit decreases dramatically."

Captain Del Rios' forehead wrinkled in thought. "So we'll have to stealth in past the forts, send SPARTANs in with the NOVA, and get the heck out of Dodge before it detonates or the Flood escape containment." The others officers gave various noises of concurrence, and the two ships crept steadily closer.

After another 15 minutes, they had made it past the fortresses to the empty space below, but the installation appeared to be cloaked, and the only way to find it without losing cloak was to delay-launch a dud Archer connected through a fiber-optic cable to the ship.

Just as the launch was about to ordered, the holotank fizzled on into the face of Shipmaster Thar. He said, "We, the Confederacy, demand we also launch a tethered missile. It is a matter of honor in the battle against the Parasite."

Captain Del Rios waved a hand. "Sure, do what you want. It's not like we're going to stop you."

As the missiles neared the approximate position of the installation, both captains and the duty watch officers had forgotten one thing. Their external gravity fields were still on.

When the missiles contacted what was in reality a wormhole terminus, they dragged the two ships in, the _Justice_'s greater mass only serving to pull it in slower. Luckily for both ships, the external gravity fields were close enough to this universe's gravity sails to allow them to pass through without being atomized.

In an instant of time that no one had managed to measure, the ships ceased to exist in one spot and started to exist in another, light-years away.

Captain Del Rios yelled, "What the _grapp _just happened?" Reports came flooding in. "Stellar Cartography is fried!" "External gravity fields all blew and their relays all tripped!" "Hull integrity on Frame 38 A at 55% and holding, refractive coating at 95% percent there!" "We lost our main comms transmitting antenna, it hit some sort of bouy !" "HOLY _maulk_ we're in for a heap of trouble!"

This last remark was directed at the contents of the sensor screen, showing over 3 dozen of the gravimetric fortresses, as well as about 40 3 km long ships a slightly farther distance away. The system had 3 inhabited planets, and debris from recent battles or accidents still stained the skies of each.

Captain Del Rios roared, "Shields on full, give some room in case the _Justice _appears!" Altitude thrusters veered the _infinity _sharply "downwards", and the _Justice _appeared, flaring brightly. Within seconds, their shields flowered into life, and then faded as power levels stabilized.

For a few brief moments, the fortresses and the two ships hung in silence, neither making a move.

Then abruptly, the forty ships started powering up devices on the outside of their hulls, and the stations' sides bloomed in an explosion as each launched a massive amount of missiles through the yellow-tinted gravimetric shield.

The radiological alarm blared, and the tactical officer breathed a curse. He called to the captain, "We have 8,000, repeat eight-triple-zero missiles inbound, 4,000, repeat four-triple-zero missiles at each of us. And they all read as nukes."

The captain nearly choked, but recovered quickly and ordered the point defense system online. All over the ship, chain guns spun up, and miniature energy projectors glowed softly as power fed into their capacitors. Once they had fully charged, they shot out and picked off one to three missiles in a line, as the ship slowly spun to bring more to bear as others cooled.

With 45 seconds until impact, the chain guns rotated and spat out literal walls lead, and the missiles in the lead of the charge disintegrated as they ran into the massed shells.

The much-reduced missiles, only 200 in number, came screaming through the lead curtain, and then their EW activated. 1 in 7 missiles either exploded in waves of static jamming or multiplied into hundreds of false missile signatures, but Athena was designed for EW even better interconnected, and the last-ditch lasers ignored the false signatures, pierced through the static, and picked off only the true threats. Thirty-one more warheads were destroyed in the short interval, but 140 still bore in on their target.

Captain Del Rios barked, "Brace for impact!" But it never came.

The warheads all detonated 30,000 kilometres off, and hundreds of bomb-pumped laser clawed towards their target. The shields were quickly overwhelmed, but as the surviving laser attempted to rip apart alloys and humans, they were literally reflected into space by the refractive coating on the _Infinity._ Designed to mitigate the damage from the immense power of Energy Projectors, the reflective coating laughed at the relatively puny energies of the X-ray lasers.

The _Justice _fared little worse. Despite worse point defense systems (She had no chain guns) and a worse reflective coating, the green ship's armor was much thicker, and her only damage was a score of small, blackened pits in her vanadium alloy armor. The two ships

stood undamaged and proud as every non-essential ampere of power was diverted to weapons systems' capacitors.

Admiral Hall, head of Manticore Wormhole Security, jerked as alarms blared, warning, "Unauthorized transit! Unauthorized transit!"

She spun to the cameras, and the sight there was unbelievable. A damaged, 5 kilometre long Åberdreadnought came through the wormhole, Warshawski sails flaring and then disappearing in a flurry of sparks that she recognized as overload. However, the sensors had detected no gravitic signals from either side of the terminus!

She screamed, "How did we not get at least a warning from Lynx?"

The sensors officer explained, "If this ship had gone in ballistic at just the right angle, it's possible that the still under construction defenses could have missed it, and it only turned on its Warshawskis as it went through. But it didn't pay off. They overloaded, and now she's a sitting duck."

Before the order to fire could be given, the intruder's altitude jets kicked in, an odd blue color, and it swung sharply downwards. "Unauthorized transit! Unauthorized transit!" The alarms squawked again.

The command bridges of every fort were stunned, their officers staring with slack jaws, as a ship came throughâ€¦and throughâ€¦and through. A 29 kilometre long ship, easily larger than 5 of the forts, loomed imperiously over them.

Admiral Hall heard a small gasp. "Oh Sweet Eridani, we're screwed." She squinted as she saw it's Washawskis also flare and fail. She wrenched her head away from the screen and punched four digits into the pad on her chair. A button rose from the armrest, and she stabbed it, grinning.

"No matter how large the Sollies or the Mesans build their ships, they can't stop 8,000 missiles with no sidewalls. And the bigger they are, the harder they fall."

But her mouth had soon morphed into an O of astonishment. The ships had started picking off missiles from far beyond normal interception range with some sort of intensely focused laser, and then outdated chain guns had spat out so many slugs that there was a literal radar contact from the spy probes around the terminus. But that wasn't even the worst of it. When the EW of the missiles, the best the Manticoran Navy could offer, went on, the ships had ignored all the false signatures and continued to pick off missiles at the same rate!

Then when the missiles, still a good deal in number, had detonated, the lasers had bounced off both ships like they were mirrors, and the only sign of millions of dollars' worth of the best equipment she had was a few blackened pits on the surface of the larger ship.

She screeched, "Reload! Reload now! Get Home Fleet on the grav com, tell them to make best speed, and get the RRF in here ASAP!"

Del Rios had to hold in a laugh at the ineffectiveness of the enemies' vast barrage of missiles. Those missiles were apparently used to get through the grav shields everything in this place seemed

to have, and by judging by their performance, they hadn't thought of a refractive coating or hadn't made an effective one.

He looked at the tactical console, and ordered, "Let's see what they make of this! Fire the Big Stick at the closest station."

A ball of Tungsten, iron and depleted uranium, the size of a wet-navy destroyer, was magnetically accelerated to 4% of the speed of light and flashed through the 30 million miles between _Infinity_ and the fort in less than 3 seconds.

Its sidewalls tore at the mass, resisting valiantly, but so great was the kinetic energy that the bubble of focused gravity literally rang like a bell before crumpling. The Super MAC round, much smaller and slower than before, still held enough power to tear through a shielded Covenant cruiser, and its record of obliterating any enemy in one shot held fast.

Against an unshielded station, not designed to resist kinetic force, the station simply flew apart when the MAC round passed straight through its center of mass. Pieces decompressed explosively, and the sidewalls vanished, leaving the MAC round to continue on its path through space.

Admiral Hall blanched. "What in all that was holy was that?!" She screeched hoarsely. The sensors officer gaped at the data on his console. "Thatâ€" He swallowed and tried again. "That was a large slug of metal accelerated to 30 million gravities. It tore right through the _Defender's_ sidewalls, and if you look there-" He pointed to the tactical map. "You can see it went right through and is still moving at 10 million gravities, or .13% of the speed of light."

She flared, "Launch all LAC's and start moving the stations back! We can't hold against two ships like that."

Slowly, the 39 remaining fortresses moved out of range, but the _Justice_ wanted its turn first.

The three energy projectors on the supercarrier glowed white and then fired three pencil-thin beams of energy at the next closest fortress.

The energy beams tore through the sidewalls like paper, and the station now sported 3 pencil-sized holes, going through the entire station. The decompression alone would have crippled that station as half the air rushed out, but one of the beams had gone straight through one of its fusion reactors, and it instantaneously lost containment.

A second station died, this time in the flower of an uncontrolled nuclear detonation. Before another could be destroyed by either ship, the 38 remaining stations had moved at incredible speeds out of range.

Athena beeped and said, "Sir, we have another salvo of missiles, about half the size of the previous heading our way, and I also see several hundred ships about $\frac{1}{4}$ the size of a Frigate heading our way on an intercept vector. Also, the small fleet of ships, designate Bogey Beta, has started accelerating at high velocities, and at

current rates, they'll be here within 5 minutes.

"I have also detected a force of several hundred ships, designate Bogey Charlie, several hours away, also accelerating on an intercept course. I recommend avoiding combat with Bogey Charlie, as those numbers would undoubtedly be able to overwhelm our point defense, and our refractive coating will eventually scorch and be rendered useless. Although we would inflict somewhere in the vicinity of 25% casualties, both ships would be lost."

Captain Del Rios ordered, "Launch Shortswords and Cutlasses, and prep Gypsy Team for armed infiltration and capture of enemy flagship. Cutlasses stay close for support, we don't have many of you to spare. Swortswords, you are cleared to engage at your discretion. We will provide support as needed. IFF tags are now active, make sure not to shoot down any friendlies out there.

In the darkness of space, far beyond both forces, the fighters and LAC's met. As the much smaller Swortswords and Seraphs found to their chagrin, the small weapons on both could not penetrate the deep yellow bands on the top and bottom of the enemies, and the only way to get a missile for a kill was to slip one down the front or back while their grav shields there were down, for some inexplicable reason. They were forced to rely on their inferior lasers, but their superior maneuverability, armor on all sides, and energy shields evened the fight.

The ships of the RFF drew to within extreme range, and halted. As their missiles began to fire and were, in turn, blown out of space, the Infinity and the Justice began picking off ships at the fringes of the force with ridiculous ease.

Athena scrunched her virtual brow in concentration. "I'm detecting tight-beam comm lasers and directed gravimetric pulses in some sort of codeâ€¦ Isolating signal directionsâ€¦ Got it. Found their flagship, it's the one in the middle receiving the most message traffic. Directing Dustin to Pelican Oh-Three-Four, and Gypsy is off."

Del Rios punched a button, and the holographic images of Gypsy Team and the Chief popped up. "Gypsy, Chief, I've directed Dustin to your Pelican, I want him with you for computer support. We want minimal casualties, as there was no reason to attack us, and we don't want another Covenant war. Shipmaster Thar has also sent a few Phantoms with Spec-Ops teams to back you up and secure areas you've cleared. Safe flying, and remember, we want their admiral or captain, alive. Infinity out." Master Chief took a glowing ship out of a nearby interface slot and plugged it in. Beyond the usual rush of cold mercury, there was silence.

As the battle in space raged, a single Pelican and three Phantoms flew unnoticed through the chaos for a moment, but as the enemy fleet neared, several flights of Shortswords and Seraphs escorted them in and blew a hole, sometimes with their own lives, through the AA fire and fighters of the enemy.

The infinity fired a half-power standard MAC round, knocking down the flagship's grav shields while leaving the ship untouched, and the Pelican and the three Seraphs flew right into the central hangar, as the fighters peeled off to return to the battle.

As the Pelican swiftly landed, the pings of multiple projectiles could be heard, as well as a few hisses of plasma weapons hitting the hull. The pilot requested, "Could you get out and stop that real quick? Those plasma weapons aren't exactly conducive to your ride's integrity."

The door opened, and the four remaining members of Gypsy Company and the Master Chief leapt out. Quickly taking cover behind the Pelican, all five swiftly pulled fragmentation grenades and threw them over the Pelican at the enemy guarding the door to the hangar. A chorus of startled screams, human-like in nature, thumps of people diving for cover, and then five dull crumps as the grenades detonated.

In the short interlude while their enemies still cowered under cover, the 5 SPARTANS fanned out, and were startled by the sight of several very human bodies on the floor, along with a pool of equally human blood. Dustin decided to interject for the first time. "By Jove! Scans of the blood indicate that these are indeed humans!" Master Chief, mildly surprised but nonplussed, calmly said, "Please send a burst to Infinity. These humans are still hostile, and I'm inclined to believe these are not humans from the UNSC."

The 5 smoothly drew their guns and spread out in the hanger, searching for additional enemies.

Master Chief turned a corner into a boxed-off area among some large containers. A stream of bullets met him. He quickly spun back around corner, waiting for his shredded shields to recharge. Checking his armor briefly for damage, he found only miniscule scratches and pits, odd for so many bullets. Checking the floor, he briefly saw that the projectiles were not bullets, but darts! He quickly opened up a commlink to the others. "Contacts using projectile weapons are extremely ineffective against MJOLNIR, caution not needed with this weapon, designate Gamma-Alpha."

A voice was heard. "Whoo-ee! Those Gamma-Alphas are in for a heapin' servin' of Falgh-whooping! Here I come!" The voice in question belonged to Jarvis-C-209, an eager man from Texas who was known for his lack of caution but also extreme expertise in avoidance. Dressed in a heavily customized, yellow, MJOLNIR variant, he could be seen leaping over boxes, and then rapid-fire shotgun blasts were heard.

A bleep signified that his shields had recharged, and he leapt back around the corner. Meeting a hail of darts, his shields quickly failed, but he strode ahead, ignoring the scratches in his olive green paint. Seeing a quartet of Gamma-Alphas, he gunned them all down with 4 precise bursts, each crumpling as the trio of bullets from his Battle Rifle went straight through the transparent orange visor of each.

Striding past them, he found himself back in the hangar proper, with dead bodies strewn about. On one side of the hangar, he saw a large number of enemies fleeing in panic from the Spec-Ops Elites, who had mandibles flared in bloodlust and energy swords drawn. There were several bodies strewn about, missing limbs and heads, and others dead from impalement.

On the other side, two SPARTANS, William-C-293 and Keith-C-257, kept slowly advancing, gunning down occasional soldiers exposed by their

creeping advance. Jane-C-241 felled all those brave enough to poke even so much as an eye out of cover with precise shots from her DMR. Jarvis was nowhere to be seen, but quick shotgun blasts and shots of panic near the exit to the hangar indicated his position.

Keith came on the comm. "Watch out for the ones with backpack-fed plasma weapons. They don't pack as much of a punch as Covvies, but they'll still hurt if you get hit without shields. Designate them Gamma-Bravos, and mark them as medium-danger targets."

Master Chief said, "Acknowledged. Mark kill priority to Gamma-Bravos." He took three giant strides and landed on a cargo container, leaping from container to container to where Jarvis was wreaking devastation. Jarvis was crouching behind a crate, shields flaring, and said, "Nice of you to join the party! Was gettin' mighty borin' all by my lonesome!"

Using another one of his frag grenades, he cleared a large pocket in the middle of the enemy group, he spun, attaching his Battle Rifle to his back and unsheathing his combat knife, he spun and landed in the middle of the cleared circle, boots thumping heavily to the floor. He kicked one man in the neck, and his head cracked to one side and then the man fell over limp, instantly dead. Before the man had even started crumpling, Chief had jumped off him, grabbed two men's heads and smashed them together. Their heads exploded like melons, the gore dripping out the bottom of the helmet.

He threw their dead bodies at two more men, knocking them down before he went for the final group of five. He whirled around, driving the knife into the base of one man's skull. Whipping it out, he bashed another man in the face, shattering his visor and shattering his skull. He dove underneath one of the remaining three, before flipping up and severing his spine.

Now only two remained, but both held plasma carbines. They both started to bring their weapons up, but Chief sprinted towards them and had rammed his knife into his chest cavity before withdrawing it and spinning on the last man, but there was still several feet between them, and his gun was aimed.

His hand tightened on the trigger, but before a single bolt of plasma flew from it, a shotgun blast blew a cantaloupe-sized hole in the man's chest. He fell to his knees, and then on his face, dead. Chief looked at Jarvis. "Good shot."

Jarvis shrugged. "Ain't nothin', sir." He nodded towards the door. "Looks locked. You should get Dustin in there, so he can wreak some good ole-fashioned chaos."

Chief looked around for an interface slot, but the ship's designers had obviously planned for this, as there was no interface port of any size. However, there was a door control, and the designers hadn't even dreamed of planning for an enemy that could rip through steel with ease. Punching a hole in the wall, he quickly extracted two wires and cut the insulation. Sheathing the combat knife, he pulled Dustin and held the chip against the wires. A green light leapt from the chip to the wires, and Dustin's English-accented voice sounded in his head.

"Someone made a poor choice. This door is directly linked to some

sort of security console, and while it'll take me a few seconds to crack the firewall, from there I'll be able to open any door I want, even airlocks. Unfortunately, that's all I can do from here, so you'll have to get me to a more central location." A few seconds later, he whistled in a synthetic voice. "Man, these people must have never heard of AIs! Their firewall wasn't even adaptive! Feel free to pull me out anytime. Oh, and get Athena to work on a new hacking dumb AI. Their code isn't even binary or hexadecimal, could have problems without Smart AIs."

A green glow returned to the chip, and Master Chief inserted his chip back into his helmet. While he wasn't a replacement for Cortana—"No one could replace Cortana"—he would do. He turned to the Pelican and waved a hand. The pilot commed, "Much obliged." He strode over to the Spec-Ops teams, who had rounded up a small group of prisoners, and turned on his external speakers. "Your job is to keep this hanger **secure.** We can't have them taking it back, or we'll be stuck on this with no ride out, and that never ends well."

The Spec-Ops replied, "Of course. We would rather die and be sent to the seven hells than fail in anything, especially from you, Demon. The dishonor would lead to a life of shame."

He noticed out of the corner of his eye the few prisoners visibly stiffen at the Sangheili's statement. He deadpanned, "What? It's not like you can even understand me." He winced as he remembered a comment of Cortana. '_For a killing machine with no emotions, you can really crack a joke when you want.'_

He jerked visibly as one of the prisoners replied, "Of course we can understand you, you Mesan scum."

'_Mesan? Maybe they are at war with these 'Mesans.' That would explain the willingness to just fire at any old ship.'_, Chief thought, suppressing any surprise (and it was considerable). He said, "We are not these 'Mesans' you speak of. I am a member of the UNSC, and the Sangheili here—" motioning to the leader of the Spec-Ops team "Are part of the Separatists, or the Sangheili Empire. We are here because **you** attacked our ships without warning or reason. Now I would suggest not moving, for the Sangheili would be happy to challenge you to a blood duel—which you would assuredly lose." The Sangheili grinned viciously and ignited his energy sword for a short moment before deactivating it and replacing back on his belt.

Turning his back on the human prisoners, he wondered, '_Did the Forerunners seed humans on more than one planet, one Earth, after they fired the Halos? And if so, what is their reaction going to be to other humans with completely different technologies? And for that matter, how do they speak English?_' Dismissing his thoughts and concentrating on the mission at hand, he turned back to the door. "Dustin, open that door. We're going in." The door began to slowly open.

The seriousness of the moment was disrupted as Jarvis hooted, "Hoorah! Time to blow this pop stand!"

Chief simply commed without looking at the others forming up behind him, "Jarvis, lock it down. We're going into a combat situation. Get serious."

Jarvis commed back, "Jeez! Alright then. But it's still time for me to get Dangerous! Enclosed spaces, narrow hallwaysâ€¦| Hoorah!"

Chief just said as the door came fully open, "I'm on point. Jarvis, you're in charge of Team Two. Keith, form up on Jarvis. You'll be taking any side passages we come across."

"Jane, William, we're going in."

****Toonity, E-Day+2****

Noble 6 returned from the habitual half-sleep he was accustomed to, as the built-in clock buzzed, signaling that it was 6:00, time to start his daily workout. He began with 5 minutes of push-ups, moving up and down so fast that it was a blur. He continued with sit-ups, and leg lifts. He stopped after realizing nothing in this civilian home was likely to be tough enough to support the weight of a SPARTAN doing pull-ups or aerial planks.

Then he manually turned down the force-multiplying circuits and nanogel support layer to 50%, grimacing slightly under his helmet as five hundred pounds of weight fell upon his back. He then repeated the workout, this time tripling the length of each workout.

After he had finished this workout, he turned to the wall-mounted clock in the kitchen, and noticed that it read 5:00. Noticing that his suits' clock read 7:00, he silently trod to the entrance of the kitchen, where he could see the clock in the still-lighted living room, and the one in the hallway. They also read 5:00. He glanced at the clock, noticing within the diagnostics files that a minor error had been reported in the date-time-sunlight-strength correlator when he had fallen through that odd hole, and therefore his suits' internal clock must be off.

Correcting this minor error, he started treading back to his seat, when he heard a soft chant from the living room, which was brightly lit. Softly walking in, he noticed that the blue skunk, Brennan, was behind the small couch, curled up in a corner. He was softly muttering, "Get her off, get her off, get her offâ€¦|" repeating endlessly.

He walked over and crouched next to him and shook him, saying softly, "Kid, kid, snap out of it." No response. He gently shook him. "Kid, get up. We've got work to do, and I need to talk to that thing in your pocket." No response. He shook him slightly harder. "Hello? Are you even listening?" No response.

Standing up, he picked up Brennan and took him to the dining room table, plunking him down in a seat. He was still muttering, and Noble 6 noticed now he was slowly, nearly imperceptibly, rocking from side to side.

Deciding that this could wait until the other members of this strange group were present, he decided to find the others. Slowly opening the door across the hall, he looked in and glimpsed a lump present underneath the bedsheets. Stealthily sneaking across the room, he swept off the covers and grabbed a drowsy Buster, also dropping him at the table in the dining room. Before Buster could even shake the sleep out of his eyes, Noble 6 was off again to find the other 2

members of the party.

After a few seconds of searching, he found the two female members in a bedroom at the end of the hall. Feathers were strewn everywhere, and the ripped remnants of pillows lay in their noble repose on the floor.

While the walls were barely visible, coated in feathers, the few cracks of wallpaper showed an eye-achingly pink wallpaper with equally vivid purple flowers. The ceiling was a very light shade of blue, with small clouds interspersed.

Noble 6 covered his visor with one hand and muttered, "Is she trying to make someone's eyeballs explode? Or is she just mostly blind and colorblind?" Walking gingerly in, noticing with distaste the forest-green, deep, plush carpet. He could feel himself sink an inch with every step he took.

He heard some muttering from the direction of the closet, where a large pile of clothing and pillows were heaped on the ground. The tip of a large, purple tail peeked out of one side, attesting to the identity of the sleeper. Rummaging around within the 6-foot tall heap, he extracted Fifi, who was currently squeezing the stuffing out of a small, fuzzy pillow. Removing the pillow only resulting in her latching on to his hand and exerting enough pressure that he could feel it even through his armor. He could hear some broken muttering in a mixture of English and French, but as it was utterly unintelligible to him, he not speaking French, he ignored it and dropped her on another chair in the dining room. She simply slumped in the chair, still sound asleep. But before she had even stopped sliding down the seat, Noble 6 was gone, returning for the other occupant of the pink room.

Extricating Babs by the ears from the heap of pink pillows and thick, purple blankets, he noticed she was wrapped around a large pillow, almost her size. She murmured, still asleep (it baffled him as to how she could still sleep through being pulled out of a bed, but she was a civilian. They had problems with perception.), "Buster, come here, my little snugglebunny." He rolled his eyes. Affection. All civilians had it, and all too often he had seen it kill them and the soldiers trying to protect them. All that affection amounted to was multiple liabilities.

He then realized with his current grip on Babs, and her current grip on the rather large pillow, that he would no longer fit through the door that was already too small and narrow for him to comfortably fit through. One of the objects needed to go, and it wasn't going to be him or Babs.

Grasping the pillow gently for him, but crushingly by any other standard, he pulled the pillow out of Babs' grasp and tossed it back onto the bed, where it rebounded off the multitude of other pillows and fell to the floor. However, this did not have consequences, as Babs, being a better morning person than Buster, instantly broke into full awareness.

"Hey, what theâ€¦ Hey, leggo!" she screamed, twisting around to face him. "What's the big idea, huh? Pulling me out of my bed atâ€¦" she saw the clock and paled. "5:10 in the MORNING?! On a SATURDAY?!" She started frothing at the mouth. "Are you insane? I need my beauty

sleep!" She started twisting and jerking, attempting to avail her ears of Noble 6's grasp. "Leggo!"

Noble 6 responded by hauling her by the ears, still protesting loudly, and dumping her at the second-to-last spot at the table. Buster had his head in the refrigerator, and his head came out, yawning, while his hands held a large jug of milk. He plodded over to the table, where a bowl of cornflakes sat. Pouring the milk into the bowl and picking up his spoon, he blearily looked over to where Babs sat, massaging her ears and muttering unintelligibly softly. He asked, "Babs, is it time for school already?"

Babs sighed. "No Buster, wake up. In case you hadn't noticed over there, Tall, Dark, and Silent just dragged me in here."

Buster blinked a few more times. "Wha? Who?" He suddenly was doused with a large bucket of ice water. He gasped and spluttered, now fully awake. "Babs? Why did you just use Gerards' Douse on me?"

Babs rolled her eyes in exasperation. "Because heâ€" she said, pointing at Noble 6, "Decided that waking everyone up by yanking them out of their beds and plunking them down at the dining room table at 5:00â€" Her glare turned slightly Schadenfreudian. "On a Saturday was a good idea." She looked around the table at the other 3 occupants. "Anyone with me?" She was met with silence. Brennan sat, still rocking slightly side to side, staring at the ceiling, Buster was suddenly fixated on his bowl of corn flakes, and Fifi was still asleep. "Buster?"

Buster said, "Mrmf Magrmf shmall," or at least that's what it sounded like, for, before answering, Buster had crammed several large spoonfuls of corn flakes into his mouth and was chewing rather noisily.

Babs turned to Fifi. "Feef? At least you're with me, right?" Met with soft snoring, she shook Fifi, hard. "Hey Feef, time to wake up!"

Fifi bolted upright. "quoi? Qui est là ?"

Babs asked again, "You're with me right?"

Fifi asked in rapid-fire French, "qu'est-ce que tu racontes?" She shook her head, and then said slowly, "I am sorry, Babs, but I have no idea why you just asked me that question. I wasâ€|.how you say, sleeping, no? It is hard to listen when one is sleeping, mon ami."

Babs sighed again. "Seriously? No one at all?" She directed her gaze to Noble 6, who by this time had removed the last chair to the living room and kneeled down, making him only slightly taller than the rest of the group.

He said, "Well, that data padâ€"The Travelerâ€"said that there was some sort of quest, but I need more information from that thing before I move a single step. So, Brennan, I need you to get out the Traveler from your pocket."

Brennan made no reply, or even an indication he had heard Noble 6. He simply sat, rocking side to side and with his gaze fixated on the

ceiling.

Noble 6 rolled his eyes, knowing none of the others could see. "Oh come on! Snap out of it, kid." No response. "Hey, kid, come on! I need that Traveler." He turned to Buster. "What the _maulk_ is wrong with him?"

Buster flattened his ears closer to his head, swallowing and saying, "Hey watch it with the language, OK? But as far as Brennan goes, it seems like some sort of extreme reaction to Fifi's lavish affections. I can't really tell why, though, as we don't really know him very well. He's new here."

Fifi winked at Brennan. "I would like to know him better, though."

Brennan's reaction surprised everything. Instead of cowering as his previous manner would have suggested, he bared his teeth, than unexpectedly executed a nearly perfect backflip over the chair by gripping the top of the chair and vaulting over and behind it. He fell into a stance that Noble 6 recognized as a fighting stance—"Suprisingly good, though nowhere near close to his prowess. However, this meant that he would likely be able to hurt the others, unprotected and weak compared to him.

He grabbed Brennan, and as Brennan growled menacingly and attempted to batter him with a flurry of punches, Noble 6 never moved. "Listen kid, calm down. I don't know why you have so many problems, but you need to stay calm."

Brennan yet again made no visible response to this, still struggling frantically. Noble 6 sighed inaudibly, than asked Buster, "Do you have any rope?"

Buster answered, "Yeah. One sec." He took another monstrous bite of cereal, and then walked to a door that Noble 6 could swear hadn't been there 10 seconds ago.

"What the _maulk_? How do things keep appearing?"

Buster's head reappeared out of the door. "Hey watch it!" His head disappeared back into the room, and various clanking and crashing noises were heard.

Several seconds later, he reappeared with a rather long coil of rope. "Will this do?"

Noble 6 gave a short, curt nod. "Yes. Hand it to me."

Buster handed him the coil of rope, and with methodical precision, showing practice, pushed Brennan down in his chair, uncoiled the rope, and wrapped and tied a knot, leaving Brennan secured to the chair, unable to move.

Noble 6 said, "Well, we're not getting the Traveler from him. Buster, can you see if he hid it in his tail or some pockets hidden behind him or some such?"

Buster laughed. "Sorry, it doesn't work that way. It's in Hammerspace somewhere, and I don't know if anyone could get it out of there if

it's in his personal Hammerspace. I'll try however."

Babs interjected, "Wait, Buster, you're a Hammerspace Hacker? I didn't know that!"

Buster smirked. "Yep. And here's why." Looking behind him, he somehow pulled out a bright pink, heavily embellished diary. "Recognize this?"

Babs paled, and then reddened in rage. "Youâ€¦. youâ€¦. you can't go around looking in people's diaries! That's just not right!" Than, ostensibly to herself, but likely heard by everyone by Buster, still standing next to the inexplicable door, "And there's some pretty embarrassing stuff in there about you."

She stood up. "And to show you just how much I appreciate that, I'm going to punt your sorry butt to Mars." She took a flying leap towards Buster, but was intercepted by Noble 6's hand.

"None of that."

But while he was stopping that confrontation, Fifi has snuck closer to Brennan, and he began to rock the chair, nearly falling over in his remonstrations.

Noble 6 turned around to discover this, and in one fluid motion, he set Babs back in her chair, grabbed Fifi, and set her back in a chair, as far away from Brennan as possible.

He said, "No. No more of that. I need information, and I will not have the people I am trying to have a serious meeting with trying to beat the _maulk_ out of each other!"

Buster tsked. "What did I say about the language? You're in my house."

Noble 6 snapped, "I don't give a d-" He sighed and shaded his visor with his hand, a gesture that looked remarkably like a facepalm. "Fine, No more fighting, no more arguing. Just for youâ€¦" He said in a tone that no one could tell whether it was serious or sarcastic, "and the ladies, I'll watch my tone. Nowâ€¦" Buster, was it? Get back to work on finding that Traveler."

Buster gave a mock salute. "Yes sir!" He disappeared back into the door, followed by smashing noises for a few seconds, and then a rapid noise of a mouse and keyboard being used quickly and professionally.

While Buster was engrossed in attempting to find the exact Hammerspace frequency of Brennan's personal Hammerspace, Noble 6 turned to Babs and Fifi. "So what exactly is this Hammerspace?"

Babs shrugged. "Well, no one's quite sure, but it's an extradimensional pocket where a variety of objects are stored, including for some reason a disproportionate amount of large, blunt objects, such as anvils, 50 ton weights, hammers, and grand pianos, as well as signs and posters. Everyone also has their own private Hammerspace, but there are group, local, regional, national, and worldwide Hammerspace grids, but the levels higher than local require special forms." She shuddered. "Your politicians in Reality got

nothing on ours. I don't even know why half of the paperwork is needed for a Hammerspace requisition. Here, take a look." She pulled out from behind her a large sheaf of papers, about the size of a small book.

Noble 6 took the offered pile and perused the first page. He agreed, "You're right, these questions have nothing to do with requisitioning. Favorite color? Boyfriend? Model of computer owned? It's more like a survey with a few requisition questions slipped in."

Babs nodded. "That's why we tend to stick to local grids for most things. However, the grids get progressively smaller, and while Hammerspace does refill itselfâ€”perhaps an explanation for why all those socks disappearâ€”rather quickly, it's possible to empty it if enough people are overusing it."

Noble 6 asked, "So where exactly is this Hammerspace?"

Babs replied, "Well, you can usually feel it behind you, or behind thin objects, like trees or lampposts."

Fifi interjected for the first time, "And do not forget the Hammerspace in mah tail or your hairâ€”in any large, poofy part of hair on your body. Oh and the Hammerspace in theâ€”" She turned to Babs. "What is the things you carry, not clothing?"

Babs said, "Accessories?"

"Oui. All of ze accessories also have some Hammerspace in them."

Noble 6 asked, "Why does nothing in this place make any sense? Extradimensional pockets with access from everywhere? How is that even possible?"

Babs smirked. "Well, around here, there's only two laws, and the first always takes precedence over the second. Conservation of Comedy, and actual physics.

See, the Law of the Conservation of Comedy states that there must be a certain amount of funny and a certain amount of serious in everyone's lives, and indeed, in the universe in general. Take Fifi here." She gestured to Fifi. "Since she always chases the men, they all run away from her, generating humorous situations. But if she were to find a man and settle down, then she would be flooded with a deluge of men chasing her. See! That way, comedy is preserved. It can be rather cruel though.

"And then there's physics. They usually apply, but when something would be funnier without them, they can be delayed or even ignored when Comedy demands."

Noble 6 just shook his head. "A world based on Comedy? A place where physics are optional? I am not going to like this place."

Babs grinned. "And it gets better. If you stay here too longâ€”we discovered this with Brennanâ€”you turn into a toon yourself. Just hope it doesn't happen while you're sleeping, or you'll never get out of that armor you're wearing."

Noble 6 said, "Wait, I'll turn into one of you?" And then several seconds later, "And you discovered this with Brennan? He's not from around here, is he?"

Babs shook her head. "In fact, we just found him two days ago, sprawled out unconscious underneath Buster's basketball hoop. He's not even really a toon. He's from Reality."

Fifi gasped. "From reality?"

Babs hurried, "Sorry, Feef, but we forgot to tell you. Don't be angry!"

Fifi snorted. "Angry? Why, now he ees exotic too, no?"

Babs facepalmed. "Fifi, you really are shameless, aren't you?"

Fifi grinned. "Why, Babs, why would you say that? It's absolutely true!"

Noble 6 looked back and forth. "I'm missing something here, and I don't want to know."

Babs, however, had completely forgotten about Noble 6. "Remember that time when Johnny got a stripe down his back, and you chased him for a week? He didn't even have a tail!"

Fifi laughed. "He was a nice man. Shame that that secrecy government programâ€if eet was secret, or even governmentâ€messed with him so much. He used to be quite the hunk.

But then they stuck him in a lab and hit him with some, how you say, radiation, no? It had some bad side effects. A Venus Flytrap was accidentally in the room, and he got horribly mutated, having the plant's head as heez own.

It was quite sad. He lost most of his sight, smell, hearing, and ability to speak in one fell swoop. Then they threw him out on the street.

He stayed here for a while, until that night. Ooh, that was ze saddest night in all of Toonity!"

Babs slowly, sadly, nodded. "The only time a toon has ever died. It had snowed for a week, and the pet store was out of insects. The radiation messed with his DNA, and so he didn't have normal toon resilience. He slowly withered away, until one day, he just fell over dead in the street."

Fifi sniffed. "It was soo sad! I cried for a week!"

Noble 6 held out his hands. "Alright, back to subject at hand, no more tangents." The two female toons ignored him. He grumbled, "Why is it no one here ever listens to me?"

Buster poked his head back out. "You know, Babs, Fifi, you guys are really singleminâ€" He was cut off by the attention of the single-minded individuals in question snapping to glare at him, literal embers flaring in both's eyes. "Never mind," he gulped and

ducked back into the door.

The two girls resumed talking, and Noble 6 resigned himself to listen. He couldn't order around citizens, let alone citizens from another nation entirely! He simply allowed any important nuggets of information seep into his mind while ignoring the rest.

"And then I spin changed into Marilyn Monroe, and Buster melted like a puddle"

".Oui, my home needs some improvements, it's getting too small for all of my clothes"

".What's wrong with Brennan? He's acting really weird"

"Ah, I may have been a little". Headstrong, no?"

"Fifi, if you're admitting you were a little headstrong, you probably scarred him for life. You know you're too outgoing for most boys!"

"Oui, I am a leetle outgoing, no?"

"A little bit? If that was a little bit, than a skyscraper is just a little bit taller than a house, Feef. Face it, you're way outgoing."

Noble 6 cleared his throat. "That's enough gossip, we have work to do." Both girls eyes snapped to his visor, and Noble 6 actually sat back half an inch in his seat, which would be jumping to the ceiling in a normal person. This was not because they were intimidating, (far from it, really) but that these two small, gossiping girls had glared at him, and their eyes were no longer their customary purple. Instead, they were fires, fires that looked like they came from Hell itself. The fact that these females could apparantly change the way their eyes looked, and that it currently looked like their faces were on fire, discomfited Noble 6. "Um, enough with the creepy eye trick. Back to buisness."

Buster popped out of the door, holding the Traveler. "Got it! Man, there was some serious Hagen encryption on that Hammerspace pocket!"

Noble 6 gestured a hand. "Sit down, and hand it to me."

Buster complied, handing the pad to Noble 6, but it remained dead. He turned the pad around and in all directions, trying to find the on switch. After several seconds, he found a miniscule blue button on the top of the Traveler, and he pressed it. The screen lit up, and the pad once again scanned its surroundings with the bright green laser grid.

It beeped, and then said, "Greetings Successor, Noble 6, Buster, Babs, Fifi. How may I be of assistance?" It noticed the casts on Brennan's arm and leg. "Infraradio healing treatment complete; removing casts."

A red laser shot out from the top of the pad, cutting the casts off. Unfortunately, it also cut about half of the ropes restraining Brennan, and he gradually started working free with his thrashings.

The pad beeped again. "I am detecting signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from Brennan, with the object of his distress beingâ€¦.. Fifi." A red laser pointed to her. "Kindly, tell exactly what you did to Brennan to damage the mental state of the only Successor among this party."

Fifi gulped and said carefully, "I, ahâ€¦ expressed mah affection for him, how you say, exuberantly?"

The pad said in a tone that invoked an image of facepalming to all present (except Noble 6 as he didn't know what a facepalm was, but he still caught the point), "And you thought it was a good idea to damage this parties' Successorâ€¦.. why, exactly?"

Fifi shrugged. "I am very reflexive, no? I just can't help myself."

Babs interjected, "Hey, that's my line!"

Noble 6 shook his head. "Alright, back to buisness. Traveler, you said something about a quest?"

The pad beeped. "Certainly. While the true cause is complicated, suffice it to say that his," pointing to Brennan, "Theirs," pointing to the toons, "And a yet-to-be-determined universe caused a catastrophic weakening of the Barriers between universes. While this will cause much good in the future, for now all is chaos, as you can see, and there are those that when they discover this, will try to conquer and oppress all, as all is now within their reach. To show the true magnitude of the task your team, among several, has been chosen to undertake, allow me to show this imagery."

A holograph popped up, showing several species, including what Noble 6 recognized as a human, some of the Covenant species, and the toons. "This is a sampling of several of the known species in the Multiverse." The hologram zoomed out and rotated, showing several planets of differing sizes orbiting around a star. "This is a sample of many of the worlds inhabited by sentient beings." The hologram zoomed out yet again, showing several galaxies overlaid on one another. "These are the common galaxies, a limit which most civilizations will never breach, as opportunities are plentiful within the galactic barrier."

The hologram zoomed out one last time, showing a vast sphere, hundreds of thousands of galaxies contained therein. "This is the average size of a universe." The universe, reduced to the icon of a circle, moved to the top left, and then a host of other circles appeared, several hundred in number, all connected by lines. "This is the known Multiverse, consisting of 473 known universes, each with several hundred thousand galaxies, which each contain hundreds of thousands of stars. And this number is not static. Each Multiverse is quite possibly infinite, with a minimum, according to Spengler's Hypothesis, of 5,000 universes contained in each."

The Multiverse, rendered into a square, was shown as on part of a very large branching structure. "While this is rare, it may be possible for those especially villainous to break alternate Multiverses, and there are billions of possible alternate Multiverses, each a tiny bit different than the previous."

The pad continued, "And then, of course, you add in the possible applications of the combination of magic and technology for effective time travel, you have all the time before and after of each Multiverse.

The hologram zoomed out, showing each square as a tiny dot, barely visible among millions of other dots representing different times. The pad concluded, "As you can see, the magnitude of the task you have been assigned is truly enormous. However, each of you will discover hidden strengths and new talents, recruiting others along the way to help hold the ground you have already taken. And can we now try to find a solution to Brennan's mental damage?"

Noble 6, reeling from the true scale of events, gruffly shook his head and said, " We don't have time. If what you say is true," ignoring an offended huff from the Traveler, " We hav no time to waste. We should get going to one of these places." Directing his gaze to Buster, he asked, "Do you have any spaceships available?"

The pad chuckled. "There is no need for spaceships, I can create portals now to any universe you desire. And The Great Clo-*ERROR*"

Noble 6 turned to the pad. "What did you say?"

The pad continued as if no comment had been made. "Has informed me that transportation will be available soon in your quest."

Noble 6 turned to the others. "Useless but able to follow orders, useless but able to follow orders, useless but able to follow orders," he said, pointing to the three toons. Ignoring any comments of an offended nature they may have made, he turned to the pad and Brennan and stated, "Useful and not needed to follow orders, and lastly, useless and unable to follow orders." He pointed to the pad. "Create a portal now, over near thatâ€¦" He looked for the door, but it had disappeared. "What the hâ€¦"never mind. Create it on that wall."

"Certainly," the Traveler said, "But may I inquire as to your intentions?"

Noble 6 said, "No. Do it now."

"Oh, all right. But I must protest your secrecy!"

The Traveler opened a portal, with a loud noise, much like that of a fast wind, with a large group of people speaking gibberish somewhere behind them. All turned to look behind them, as intermixed with the gibberish were words, disturbing words.

"You. You will all feel pain... and death. Oh yes... you will wish to die before I am done... and I will... gladly grant your... request."

When they turned back to the wall, a large hole stood in the wall, the bottom positioned at floor level.

Noble 6 smiled underneath his helmet, but just at that moment Brennan wiggled free and before he could leap off to who-knows-where, Noble 6

caught him by the scruff of his neck, a frequent occurrence in the past day.

Brennan curled into a ball, and Noble 6 tossed him through the portal.

The pad said, "What? Why did you toss the Successor into the portal? That may lead into a freezing wasteland, a boiling volcano, or even the vacuum of space!"

Noble 6 shrugged slightly. "He's the most useless, and the most expendable, member of the group at this time."

The pad said, "Oh, Noble 6, that was a poor decision. While he may be incapacitated at this time, he may have skills that will be valuable. He never got the opportunity to tell, as well as the others."

Noble 6 ignored him and waved to the other three toons. "Time to go."

They all shook their heads. "No way! That thing said it might go into outer space!"

Noble 6 rested one hand on the butt of his pistol. "Get in before I decide to get creative with my encouragement."

Seeing him ready to pull out one of his variety of weapons, they all gulped. "Geronimoo!" yelled Buster, doing a front flip into the portal.

Babs shrugged. "Once more into the breach!" She jumped headfirst in.

Fifi sighed. "Ah, to jump or not to jump. That eez the question, no?" She walked in calmly. "Ah will not lose mah dignity jumping into a glorified door!"

Noble 6 waited to be sure all had made it through, than grabbed the pad, attached it to the magnetic belt on his waist, and also walked slowly into the portal, leaving the lights still on.

Together, yet apart, they left on a journey that would take them farther than any ship ever could.

****Earth Prime, E-Day+2****

"Lieutenant, Command wants you and your boys. Call 'em in for a briefing at 0700."

Gary looked up from his daily cleaning of his M16A2, and saluted. "Sir!"

One hour later, Lieutenant Biggs and 1st Platoon were seated in the briefing room.

A captain stood before them. "Ever since your first contact with the insectoid hostiles yesterday, we have held a recon sat in geosynchronous orbit over the general area and a drone on standby waiting for closer pictures, and, if necessary, close air support. Evacuations have started. However, the clouds you encountered have

dispersed, revealing this."

A screen hung from the ceiling, and portrayed upon it was a photograph of what were obviously vehicles of some kind, with small specks that could only be the insectoids.

"We tried to get a closer look with a Predator, but we lost contact with the Predator a quarter-mile from the image's location. We believe this to be their base camp. Those vehicles were obviously not here yesterday, or they would have used them in the obviously hostile action of killing civilians within their own homes.

"We need intel on where these vehicles are coming from, and if possible, a way to bottleneck or destroy that means of supply. This is where you come in. You will be part of a strike team, along with 4th platoon, and 3 Abrams we have allocated to your group. You will be in tactical command, so be careful. Until we get more Abrams from the States, we only have about 30 in total, and try not to lose any Abrams. Dismissed."

"Sir yes sir!" saluted the others. As they left to prep their Bradleys, grab their equipment, and inform the other groups in the mission, the captain grammed Gary's shoulder.

"Lieutenant, be careful. Our Bradleys may be tough, but the insectoids have already shown that they can take them out. Do not attempt peaceful contact. As of now, they are hostiles. They killed nearly 100 civilians, if counts are correct, and we don't have the firepower yet to back up any negotiations or demands. It's en route from the US, but we won't have it all for several weeks.

"Exercise extreme caution, but don't be a coward. If those bugs get in the way of completing your objective, blow them straight to hell."

Gary saluted. "Yes sir."

The captain clapped him on the back. "Good. You'd better be going, it's 4 hours to your objective."

As Gary left the building, he couldn't help feeling that something, anything, was going to go wrong. And when it did, it would spell trouble for him and his men.

9. A Silent Hill

A/N: Here's chapter 9, a respectable 7,000 words. Also, many of my other stories are updated frequently, so check them out. Next on the list of updates is the Elmyra Incident Files.

Anyway, enjoy the insanity!

Billybobjoe47s

Chapter 9: A Silent Hill

****Earth 4, E-day+2****

Admiral Miles of the Rapid Reaction Force watched in disbelief as the

4 ships landed in the main hangar, and then two groups piled out. The first was a group of 5 heavily armored soldiers, covered in ammunition and weapons, and they showed remarkable coordination and reflexes, quickly taking cover behind the green, blocky ship they had landed in. However, as they quickly threw a hand grenade, clearing the nearest guards, and proceeded to brutally slaughter the Marines, they showed battle experience. And a slaughter it was. Although the Marines assigned to the hangar attempted to hold them off, time and time again they were outwitted and then killed by the variety of weapons that the 5 intimidating soldiers held.

But the greater surprise with this group was that when the largest, dressed in green, looked around one corner and took several pulser bursts to the face, his armor didn't even crack. Instead a flashing shield of some kind appeared to protect him, and then felled the two soldiers facing him with two bursts straight through the faceplate.

As they began to roll up the Marine guards on one side of the hangar, his attention was drawn towards the other side of the hangar, where the 3 other ships had landed. These ships were different, because while they were green, they were curved and organic in nature. Their bay doors opened, but nothing came out. The guards, confused, moved closer in, investigating. One, a brave private, walked cautiously right up to the doors of the craft. But even as he did this, on 3 sides of the guards, glowing spears of energy appeared out of the air, and the guards' confusion was rewarded with impalement upon these swords.

The air shimmered, and two dozen things appeared. As tall as the armored soldiers, these creatures were obviously not human, with four mandibles and knees that bent the wrong way. Their hooved feet beat upon the ground as they roared and proceeded to gut the second row of guards. The Marines retreated, firing frantically, but their pulser darts and plasma blasts were also reflected by some sort of shield. Only when several soldiers, two holding plasma carbines, all focused on one alien that its shield flared brightly and broke with a bright flash. However, before any more damage could be dealt, it lithely rolled behind a crate, and then returned fire with a portable, small plasma carbine. This was the smallest piece of plasma technology that he had ever seen.

As the Marines were effectively herded into a corner by the group of aliens, the supersoldiers had started to mop up the opposition on the other half of the hangar. They seemed to do it effortlessly, and not a single enemy was even harmed in this massacre.

By this time, all the Marines were either dead or cornered by the aliens. To his astonishment, the tallest alien, wearing midnight black armor, stepped up, and pointed to the weapons of the Marines. It was an obvious sign, and the Marines complied by dropping their weapons. The aliens grabbed them and retreated to a safe distance, watching the prisoners warily.

The Internal Security Officer, in charge of several consoles at the front of the bridge, gasped. "Sir! Something just blew right through the door control guards like they didn't even exist. It's got control of all the doors except the blast doors to the bridge and reactors."

Miles groaned. "So now the intruders have free run of the ship. Anything else hacked?"

The officer tapped at another of his consoles. "No, luckily all the consoles are not connected. However, if they get to a computer in the reactor room, Damage Control, Life Support, or the Auxiliary Control Room, they could feasibly destroy the ship."

Miles snapped, "All security teams and Marines report to the nearest essential control room. Be prepared for heavily armed intruders." He turned away from the screens.

As Master Chief and Gypsy Company entered the hallway outside of the hangar, he immediately saw a split in the corridor, with three options. He ordered, "Team Two, take the right-hand hallway. I will take the left-hand hallway. Radio silence from now on, only essential communications."

Jarvis said, "But that means no bragging!"

Chief replied, "Lock it down. Combat mode now, Jarvis. Silence."

Jarvis nodded, then pantomimed zipping his mouth shut.

As they spread out of visual contact, Chief immediately noticed the locked doors and empty hallways. "Dustin, what are the chances that this is a security lockdown, and we'll only find resistance at the important locations?"

Dustin replied, "Roughly 85% for the first, and 74% for the second, which means most likely."

Chief nodded. "Then we proceed."

As the three jogged down the corridor, a flat-out sprint by any other standard, they noted the empty hallways, and Dustin began to compile a hallway/room map for the ship.

Suddenly, Chief stopped and held up one hand. His auditory enhancers picked up a sound. He crouched down, silently walking to the nearest intersection, a 3-way intersection. Threading his fiber optic cable down towards the ground and attaching it to his rear camera feed, he was greeted with a barricade protecting a heavy blast door. Protecting both barriers were a double dozen of heavily armed soldiers, some with the dart guns that were so ineffective, while others toted the backpack-mounted plasma rifles.

Snaking it back around the corner and restowing it in his belt pouch, he signalled to the others, "twenty-four-hostiles, miz-of-weapons." The others signaled assent, and he outlined his plans with hand signals.

William rolled swiftly across the hallway, eliciting a startled yelp and the sound of weapons being trained. However, Jane and the Chief each tossed a plasma grenade onto opposite ends of the group.

He heard screams as the heated plasma stuck onto people and burnt through armor, clothing and skin. He could see the sight in his head, as the frantic members of the group attempted to pull off the flaming

blue orbs, but failing. Then two crashes sounded, and the telltale blue flash of plasma detonation.

All three SPARTANS rolled into the hallway, spraying assault rifle fire at the much-diminished group of hostiles. Most fell, but a few ducked in time and returned fire. However, before the shields of the SPARTANS fell from the inaccurate fire, they had vaulted over the barriers easily and dispatched the others with knives to the heart, head, or broken necks from superhuman kicks and punches.

He found a keypad, and smashed the face. Reaching inside, he grabbed two insulated wires and removed the insulation with his knife. He felt the familiar absence of cold mercury as he unplugged Dustin and held the chip to the wires.

The green glow disappeared from the chip, but he soon heard Dustin's satisfied tone: "That's the ticket. This is the door to Engineering. If you can get me to a console inside, free reign is ours."

The blast doors soon began to open, and the green glow returned to the chip as Chief returned it to his helmet.

As the blast doors opened enough that he could see inside, his visor whipped to the side, as several pistol shots drained his shields a quarter. A scared engineer, holding a small pistol, was visible.

He activated his external speakers, and said calmly, "Drop the pistol." His reply was a pair of badly aimed panic shots, and Chief pulled out his pistol. A well aimed shot reduced the barrel of the pistol to slag, and the panicked engineer dropped the useless weapon and dived behind a pile of crates.

Ignoring the cowering engineers, now visible behind desks and computer terminals, Chief asked, "Dustin, which terminal is the central?"

Dustin replied, "I'd guess it's the big one in the middle."

Walking over, Chief unplugged Dustin and held the chip next to an interface slot; the green glow disappeared, and a delighted voice sounded. "Chief, I've got access to the Engineering, Coolant, Reactor Ejection, and Life Support, as well as full schematics of the ship. I have here the locations of Engineering, Auxiliary Control, Life Support, the Bridge, and the Flag Bridge. If you want, I can depressurize the ship, just enough to knock out the security, then we can stroll to the bridge unmolested."

Chief said, "It's worth a try. Do it."

Admiral Miles watched in sick fascination as the cameras showed the guard to Engineering gutted and the door opened. As he watched, he winced as Chief Engineer Harden pulled out his sidearm and silently pleaded, "Don't do it, don't shoot at them." But Harden sure enough pulled several shots, that bounced off of the green soldier's shields. He whipped his visor around towards the engineer, but instead of killing him, he simply shot his pistol out of his hand, nonchalantly, not even aiming. He turned back, paused for a moment, and then strode towards the main console. As he watched, the soldier pulled something, glowing green, out of the back of his helmet, and held it next to the console. The green glow vanished, revealing a

microchip with an interesting hole in the middle. Even as she watched this, the Internal Security officer yelled, "Sir, they've hacked Engineering, Life Support, Coolant Systems, and they've got full schematics now."

Admiral Miles felt a sick feeling. "Helmets on, now!" he snapped, and all the bridge officers hurriedly pulled on their helmets and sealed them, just as the air began to hiss out of the bridge.

As the bridge officers sat back down, he snapped to the Internal Security officer, "The green one has some sort of virus in that chip he's holding. He's first priority."

"Yes sir."

As Master Chief waited, Dustin let out an exaggerated sigh. "Don't think it worked. Note how most people are wearing vac suits."

Chief shrugged. "Any alternative is worth trying once. Now we regroup with Team Two and head to the Flag Bridge."

A staticky com was heard, but it was still mostly understandable. "Team Oneâ€|. Come inâ€| Auxiliary Controlâ€|. Pinnedâ€|. Inside."

Chief rapidly replied, "We copy, and we're coming to give fire support." He glanced to the others. "Everyone hear that?" They nodded. "Good. Double time! We're going three decks up, and following the gunfire from there."

They sprinted out the door, Chief retrieving Dustin and reinserting him into his neural linkup. They reached unrealistic speeds to any non-SPARTAN, even able to outrun Elites and indeed, even Scorpion tanks now.

Within seconds, they were at the elevator. Chief ordered, "No lifts. Break the doors, and up the shaft." William pried open the doors, and all three leaped in, catching hold of the lift cables and swiftly climbing up the three decks.

As they broke open the next set of doors, rapid gunfire could be heard, along with the occasional scream, coming from the right. Turning the corner, a makeshift barricade had been erected facing the open blast doors, and a dozen hostiles were crouched behind it, firing at the SPARTANS inside. A few more were on the ground, bleeding or dead.

The three SPARTANS of Team One swiftly gunned the hostiles down, they having no cover and being surprised from a different direction. The two others of Team Two quickly sprinted out, joining Team One behind the barricade, surprised yells coming from the other side of Auxiliary Control.

As Chief peered out of cover, he could see a similar set of blast doors, complete with barricades and a dozen hostiles. He ordered, "Jane, hit them hard. In this case, we don't want covering fire. Jane quickly stood up, and several soldiers peering out of cover fell as they took two DMR rounds to the visor each. The others quickly ducked behind cover, and Chief made his move.

With hand signals, four of the SPARTANS rushed forwards, taking advantage of the fear caused by Jane's marksmanship. Within 5 seconds, they had vaulted over the barriers and began to kill the remaining soldiers.

Once they were all dead, they turned back towards Auxiliary Control. While a few consoles were sparking, hit by fire from either side, the majority of the consoles were intact. Chief unplugged Dustin and held him to the nearest console.

Dustin nearly squealed with glee. "I have them now! We have control of everything now. Want to broadcast a surrender demand to the flag bridge? Because I can do that."

Chief nodded, a gesture Dustin could surely see now, as he undoubtedly had control of the security cameras by now. "Very well."

Dustin replied, "You're on the intercom now."

Master Chief said, in his best official voice, and loudly indeed, "This is Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Sierra-117, of the UNSC. We have control of your ship, and are requested to surrender. Should you fail to comply, I will set the reactors to overload."

Quickly a proud, but resigned voice came over the intercom. "This is Admiral Miles. I surrender this ship to the UNSC, whatever that is, and request that all personnel of the _Blackbird_ surrender as well. I expect you'll be meeting me at the flag bridge."

Master Chief turned to the others. "Mission accomplished. Do we have comms to the _Infinity_?"

William looked at his pad. "We have an indirect way, as the long-range comms were damaged. We'll send messages to the _Judgement_, _who'll send them to the _Infinity._ So in a roundabout way, yes we have communications."

Chief nodded. "Good. Send word of success, and let's double time to the bridge. And I need a drink. Speeches are definitely not my forte."

Jarvis SPARTAN smiled. "Too silent and deadly, eh? Let me make all the speeches, then."

"Definitely not, Jarvis."

** F-1, E-day+2**

Deep within a lush jungle, a lone Togruta ran, panting. Ever since the Great Betrayal, she had been hiding in the nearby rural, out-of-the-way village. But now, the years of peace had been shattered.

A ship, unfamiliar in design, had descended from parts unknown, and several bounty hunters had piled out. Gods know how, but they knew about her, and they were hunting her. She had run, hoping to save the village, but the bounty hunters had caught the thrill of the hunt, and had departed after her, the flames of death in their wake.

She stumbled over a root and tumbled into a small clearing. The sun shone brightly, which mocked her and her flight from darkness. As she stood up, she hissed at a slightly twisted ankle, and began jogging to the other side of the clearing.

Before she had even reached the halfway point, however, a loud buzzing noise filled the clearing.

A large speeder flew overhead, and descended on the clearing with a hiss of coolant.

The Togruta gasped and turned to run, but a deep voice said, "Don't move unless you want a hole in your skull."

She turned around to see the sight she had been fleeing from. A small group of bounty hunters, all arrayed in various clothing and all heavily armed.

Ever so slowly, she brought her hands up, but the leader, the one with the deep voice tsked. "We know your secret skills, and we won't be having any of that."

A long bolt of lightning struck her on one leg, and she stumbled and fell as the electricity arced across her body. With gritted teeth she stood back up, and began reaching to her hips, where two gleaming silver cylinders were holstered.

The lightning struck a second time, and this time she fell to her hands and knees, the sweat from her panicked flight now rising off of her in a steaming mist.

Just then, a shadow appeared right above the leader of the bounty hunters. He looked up, startled. "What the frak?"

A blue ball of undifulate energy hit him right in his unprotected face. He crumpled, the others making startled exclamations. Another blue ball fell out of the hole and hit an underling, the lowest member of the pack. A pink streak hit the second in command in the leg, and he fell to the ground cursing. Finally, a purple streak landed in the middle of the astonished hunters.

The second in command cursed, "What the _Pyram_ was that?" As he looked around, he realized that his attackers were aliens of some kind, though not any he had encountered on his hunting trips.

Picking up the first one, the dark blue ball, showed an animal with a large tail, curled in fetal position. He turned it from side to side, but it was unresponsive.

"Hmmm, maybe this one's dead." He threw it to the side, and turned to the other streaks, which were revealed to be two aliens of a different species to the first, and a purple member of the original species of aliens.

"What the _Pyram_?" he repeated.

All of the aliens stood up, and the pink one said in flawless Galactic Basic, "Well, that hurt. Who are you?" she said, as she saw

the Togruta woman and the group of bounty hunters.

The bounty hunters grinned. The second in command said, "Well, we were con a collection run when your little group fell out of the sky and knocked out our fearless leader," gesturing to the fallen leader. "I'm afraid I'll have to demand a recompense."

"Like what?" The light blue alien demanded. "Money?"

The second in command, now leader, nodded. "That would be nice."

Reaching behind them, they pulled out a large quantity of paper and tossed it to the ground in front of the bounty hunters. "Here."

The bounty hunters examined it, and one said immediately, "What is this Kitchkeni? No one uses paper money anymore!"

The three aliens looked up. "What, good old dollars not perfect enough?"

The new leader grinned and shook his head, getting to his original intention. "I'm afraid that just won't do. No, I'm afraid we'll have to demand something else in payment."

The purple one spoke up, with a feminine voice and an accent that none of the members of the hunters present could ever remember hearing. "Like what?"

The leader grinned lustfully. "Like you."

"Wait, what?" The members of the party screamed. "No way!"

"I'm afraid you don't have a choice." Said one of the underlings, now also grinning.

Just then, a loud thump sounded behind them, in some boulders hiding the other half of the clearing from view.

"What was that?" asked one of the underlings.

The leader shrugged. "I don't know, why don't you check it out. We'll wait to have our fun until you return."

The underling crept towards the rocks, gun raised. He crept very slowly, so slowly, that after several minutes, the leader broke. "Will you get the Kitchkening move on? You're taking Kitchkening forever!"

While he was screaming this, one of the other underlings said, "Hey, where'd the first one go?" but he was unheard over the rage. "All right, all right!" muttered the underling, and he now normally walked over to the boulders. Just then, a flash rang out from one of the boulders.

As Noble 6 landed behind a boulder, he peeked around one side and assessed the situation quickly. Hostiles surrounding the three toons, with Brennan nowhere in sight. Just then a dull clunk sounded, and Noble 6 turned to the source of the noise to see Brennan, still unresponsive, hit a rock and fa to the ground.

Snaking a hand out, he grabbed Brennan and hauled him back behind the boulder. Peeking around the boulder once more, he saw one hostile slowly creeping towards the boulder, so slowly, it was nearly imperceptible even to his enhanced senses.

Seeing that he had time, he turned back to Brennan, now slumped against the bottom of the boulder. He picked him up, activated his external speakers to minimum volume, and hissed, "Hey, kid! Hey, kid! Snap out of it!" No answer.

He hissed in frustration, and shook Brennan. "Kid, if you don't snap out of it, your friends may die. You hear me kid? Die!"

After no response, he shook him harder, but nothing seemed to work. He turned and cursed. "_Grapp_!" He turned back and tossed him back against the rock. "If you won't help, I'll have to risk it myself."

However, the impact against rock, a hard impact fueled by frustration and superhuman strength, broke something inside of Brennan.

Both with a muted crack as something in his tail broke, and the flashing open of his eyes, it was evident something had changed.

"What? Where am I?" he blurted.

Noble 6 sighed in relief. This would make it much easier. "No time to explain, just do exactly what I tell you, or some of your friends are going to die." Brennan gulped and nodded. "Good. I need a distraction so that I can come up on that group of hostiles there."

He lifted up Brennan so that he could see through a crack in the rock their opponents. Handing him a vaguely gun-shaped object, he said, "This is a flare launcher. I need you to shoot it into the forest behind them or or one's footâ€"whatever will cause the most confusion.

Then I will be behind them, and eliminate themâ€"silently. As long as their attention is not facing me, they'll never know what hit them until they're dead or unconscious. Got it?"

Brennan shakily nodded, and gripped the flare launcher tightly.

"Wait until I signal you, then fire," Noble 6 said as he slipped through the boulders to begin his hunt.

After several seconds, he heard furious screaming from the group, and thought this would be the perfect time to execute his plan. He waved to Brennan, but nothing happened. He waved again, and this time, Brennan aimed and fired, aiming for the center of the group.

However, his aim was off. While he aimed for the middle of the group at ankle height, he instead managed to hit the erstwhile leader â€"the one doing all the talking and screaming- in the face.

He immediately began screaming as the burning phosphorous began

melting and setting fire to his skin and hair. He thrashed around and fell to the ground, rolling around while screams of agony sounded from his throat.

An eager underling attempted to pull the burning phosphorous off of the leader's face, using his clothing as a short-term shield between his hand and the burning red lump, but found to his detriment that only half of the phosphorous detached, and immediately stuck to his clothing, soon melting the artificial fabric and starting to consume his hand. He screamed also in agony and joined his leader on the ground as both steadily began to catch fire.

This sight proved a more-than-adequate distraction as all the members of the group turned in horror to watch their terrible demise. That horror grew as the leader, still unconscious, caught fire as well. He quickly woke up and added another scream to the chorus of agony.

Noble 6 crept up behind them and drew his two knives. Swiftly, he slit the throats of the two rearmost, who had been guarding one side of the circle which held the three toons. They died with a soft gurgle, a stark contrast to the screaming death song of the three on the ground.

The way to the two toons clear, he threw the bodies behind the boulder he had emerged from, and swiftly stole into the now-broken circle.

He tapped all three toons on the shoulder, and all jumped and turned with terror written on their faces. That fear only eased slightly as they saw Noble 6, but he harshly gestured to the boulders, and whispered, "Run, if you want to live."

The three scampered for cover like mice, and Noble 6 resumed his deathly stalk. Working his way around the circle of bounty hunters, he slit the throat of each one, until their numbers had been halved.

Then, unable to resist with the red haze of battle fever in his mind, he turned on his external speakers with a loud crackle of static.

As the bounty hunters turned, they were greeted with the sight of a behemoth dressed in an immense amount of armor. They were understandably frozen stiff, until one particularly smart minion put 2 and 2 together and screamed, "He killed the bosses! Get him!"

As they rushed him with a roar, Noble 6 flicked the blood off of his knives and smiled slightly under his helmet. This wouldn't even pose a challenge.

Instantly, his bearing changed. No longer was he the silent death, stealing in under cover of night. Now he was a proud warrior, facing his opponents with honor, no matter how little of that particular characteristic they held.

He began to spin, whirling with his two knives outstretched. Taking a leap into the midst of the enraged hunters, his knives immediately decapitated two before embedding themselves in two more's abdomens. Withdrawing his knives before his opponents could even turn to face him, he slashed and two more lay dead, throats cut. As he continued

to slaughter the members of the group, a certain gruesome beauty could be seen, in his grace and fluidity as he moved from one enemy to the next, sure in his strikes and moving to the next before the previous had fallen, blood spurting from them like a sick fountain. In a way, it was a dance, and indeed, Marines, survivors of the so-called "Miracle Ops" back on Earth, had a name for how SPARTANS looked in hand-to-hand combat: the Dance of Death.

It was over in a manner of seconds. He stood in the middle of a circle of corpses, not even breathing heavily. He wiped blood off of his visor, flicked it off his knives, and sheathed them with a spin.

The rest of him was nearly spotless, only a few flecks of blood dotting his armor occasionally, with the exception of his boots. They were stained with the blood that was slowly soaking into the ground. By now, the screams had stopped, and he turned back to the boulders where his companions were hidden.

Turning the corner to where they all were, he found the three he had just rescued panting heavily with wide eyes. All three jumped on him. "Thankyouthankyouthankyouthan kyou!" they blurted.

Noble 6 began to pry them off his armor, but they were so disproportionally strong that he had trouble getting enough leverage to peel their small bodies off him. "That's enough, now. None of that." Finally succeeding in removing Buster, he proceeded to work on Babs. "Get off!"

They responded by hugging him all the tighter. "Vous are my hero!" gushed Fifi. Noble 6 rolled his eyes. "Get off! Why don't you go bother Brennan, he helped too." Instantly he regretted slightly siccing Fifi back onto Brennan, but it had to be done.

Brennan, however, hadn't moved. He was staring at the dead bodies, having seen the entire debacle. The dead bodies of three still smouldered as the flares burned merrily. A look of horror was etched onto his face.

Noble 6 turned, having finally succeeded in removing all three toons. "Brennan? Oh no." He recognized that look. The look of a rookie just after his best buddy gets killed, or civilians die. He strode over to Brennan, and turned him around. "Don't look that way. It was necessary. If you hadn't killed them, they would have done worse to your friends."

Brennan nodded, but the look didn't fade. "Butâ€¦ the screamsâ€¦. They didn't need to die like thatâ€¦"

Noble 6 shook his head. "They did. That was the only way, and it happened. You can't go back and change time. Look on the good side. Your friends are safe, and you aren't in that weird coma."

Brennan nodded again. "True, we can't change it," he looked over to the three toons, hysterically laughing together. "And they are safe." His face firmed. "I guess that is it."

He walked over to the three. "Glad you guys are safe." However, his understated relief was quickly squashed as Fifi leapt on him. "Vous ar my hero!"

"Ack!" he choked. "Get off!"

Noble 6 saw an opportunity and took it. "He's right. In case you haven't noticed, we're in a war zone. We're not home, and people can, and will, die if this trend continues. We can't have messing around in a war zone."

Seeing that this didn't change a thing, he said forcefully, "No messing around. Get off him, and stay off as long as we're in danger."

Fifi reluctantly returned to the ground, and Brennan invisibly blew a long sigh of relief. Turning, he mouthed, 'Thanks,' and Noble 6 surreptitiously inclined his head.

"Now, where's the Traveler?" said Noble 6.

Brennan looked around. "Oh, it's over there." The spot in question was several yards away, and soft, indignified sounds could be heard. As Brennan picked it up, he heard, "Thank goodness! That dirt was getting into my chassis. Oh, Successor! Good to see you are functioning again. However, you've acquired a hairline fracture in one of your tail vertabrae. You need to be more careful, Successor. I'll begin infraradio healing treatment."

The pad beeped, and Brennan went back to the main group, handing it to Noble 6. "Here you go."

"Traveler, where are we, exactly?" Noble 6 asked, and the pad paused.

"Unknown." A green laser swept out, and the pad beeped again. "Ah, this is F-1. And I must ask, is the group of corpses over there your doing?"

"Yes."

"Ah, well, then. We should be moving on. I'm afraid your initial destination is still a few universes off."

"Mind sharing where we're going?"

"I'm sorry, that has been classified by The Great (ERROR)."

"Who?"

Why, (ERROR)!"

"Never mind, you're obviously not telling. Open a portal."

"Very well, although I must protest I clarified who had classified that information."

Another portal opened, and Noble 6 led the way this time, followed by the three toons stunting in. Brennan sighed. "I really hate these portals. Every landing so far has been painful." He walked in calmly, hoping that this time would be different.

In the silence, a lone Togruta jumped up out of the pile of dead bodies. She looked towards the odd portal, and then held her right hand to her lips, holding the other towards the portal. "Thank you," she whispered, and then turned to the left, where the flames of her burning village still billowed. She ran off into the jungle, leaving the clearing alone and abandoned.

****Unknown Earth, E-day+2****

Bella snarled at her enemies, those who she hated. She would end this now.

"Wait," one called. "Maybe we can discuss this."

Her posture softened slightly, but suddenly, a blinding flash of light and a massive explosion filled the area with smoke and broke the windows in half of Oregon.

When the dust cleared, all that was left of Bella, her allies, and her enemies was a large smoking crater, the surface melted to glass. In one fell swoop, half of the resident superhumans on this planet, known as vampires and werewolves, had been obliterated.

Although forensic investigators and FBI officers attempted for years to figure what had caused the massive explosion, no clue was ever found, and the incident was written off as a meteor strike.

However, far away in Canada, a piece of mangled metal was flung by the explosion. Nestled underneath a tree and then buried in the next years' snow, it was unlikely that anyone would ever find the piece of metal.

But if they had, they would have been able to read two words, barely visible but still understandable. 'Unto Dawn,' they read.

****Earth Prime, E-Day+2****

With the rumbling of 12 Bradleys and 3 Abrams in his ears, Gary could hardly hear the sound of his men conversing in the troop compartment. He ignored the loud noise that was deafening him, instead turning his gaze out the viewports, to where a small rise lay. Beyond that small rise, it was open flatland all the way to the small copse where the Insectoids were located.

They had spent several hours in the loud sound of full speed, but their morale was high nonetheless. After this mission, they were guaranteed some leave, as base rules said that two missions in less than one week, when not in a state of war, meant one week's leave, with no duties. This was a fine deal, and one the men intended to capitalize on as soon as they got back from this recon.

However, the mission still lay ahead. As soon as they were behind the rise, Gary radioed, "Silent running!" The rumble of engines faded, and Gary could feel the silence after so long with loud noise.

Dismounting from the Bradley, he and the other men under his command walked up to the top of the small rise.

Gary motioned to one of the men. "Hand me your binoculars." He

complied, and Gary crept over the ridge, trying to see something within the depths of the copse.

However, all he could make out were trees and shadows. "Screw this," he hissed. "I'm going to have to get closer."

Standing up into a crouch, Gary started walking down the other side of the hill, binoculars still trained on the copse. However, his fifth step was met with air, and he fell several feet onto his rear, landing hard.

The binoculars bounced out of his hands, loosened from the fall, and broke on the rocks farther beneath him.

"Sir! You alright there?" called down one of his men.

"Yeah, just a bruise. But we'll be humping it on foot from now, there's no way that the vehicles'll make it down this cliff. Looks like intel was wrongâ€¦. You'd think they would have known about this, having sat at Baumgartner for seventy years mapping terrain."

"Yeah, the little desk jockeys," called a different person. "Need any help getting up, Lieutenant?"

Gary said, "No, I'm good. I'll be up there in a moment. Oh, and I broke the binoculars I borrowed. They're useless now."

A third voice broke in. "Wait, WHAT? You broke my binoculars? Those were expensive!"

"Sorry," Gary yelled apologetically.

"Whatever! You aren't sorry one bit!" yelled back the owner of the binoculars. Gary grinned despite himself as he climbed back up the steep cliff.

"You're right. I couldn't care less right now."

A few seconds later, he hauled himself over the edge of the cliff, immediately standing up and striding over to the others.

"We'll have to go on foot, because we can't see into the copse from here, and the vehicles aren't getting over that ridge and back."

The others all groaned, but complied, hauling their gear out of the Bradleys and shouldering their heavy packs.

"Forward march!" ordered Gary, and they climbed down the cliff and began hiking the two miles towards the copse of trees.

Half an hour later, they stopped just outside of the small patch of trees.

"Stay here," ordered Gary, and with a relieved sigh they all rested their packs on the ground, sitting down. For Gary, however, there was no such rest. He still had a mission to accomplish.

Creeping into the trees, he saw that the trees were in fact just a thin band around a small pond. He was about to stop when an Insectoid

marched past not 10 feet in front of him, luckily not noticing Gary frozen in front of a tree.

After the Insectoid had passed, Gary dove into the nearest bush, still hyperventilating at how close he had been, careless as he was.

Crawling to the end of the bush, he sared into the clearing. All around were Insectoids, as well as strange vehicles, six-legged monstrosities with their lower leg joints covered in sharpened blades.

Activity scurried everywhere, and boxes of ammunition were being loaded within each of the legged walkers. It was obvious they were preparing for an assault.

Gary cursed, and ran back to his group. Quickly shouldering his pack, he yelled, 'Everyone, get back to the Bradleys! We have an imminent assault on somewhere. The Insectoids are gearing up. Triple time!'

The others wasted not a second as they leapt to their feet, grabbed their packs, and began to sprint towards the Bradleys, putting on their packs as they ran.

Gary was at the head of the pack.

After a good deal of sprinting, they collapsed at the base of the cliff.

Someone called down, "What's the big hurry, Lieutenant?"

Gary panted for a moment, and then straightened. "We have an imminent assault somewhere! Inform Command!"

"Assault?Someone get on the radio!"

As the infantry recovered and began to clamber up the cliff, the sounds of engines rekindling could be heard.

Even as the last man stood up at the top, the others were piling into the Bradleys, the Abrams already beginning to move.

As they rumbled down hill, Gary took out a map and studied it. According to the map, the only break in this direction was a small pass—the only place the Insectoids could move vehicles through.

"Head to grid point X421!" He barked through the radio, and he could feel the Bradley turn in the direction he had ordered.

He swiveled the turret backwards, he caught the trailing edge of an Insectoid force, quite large, heading in a direct line towards where they had been. If they could have climbed the ridge and kept going, they would have headed straight towards Baumgarter.

Gary paled as that took hold in his brain. He ugently stiwtched bands on his radio, and said, "Command, do you read? This is Lieutenant Biggs."

A voice crackled over the radio. "Lieutenant Biggs, this is Command. Is your mission complete?"

Gary said, "Yes sir, but we have an imminent assault upon an unknown location, but it seems likely that it is Baumgartner. I would recommend you prepare, we'll try to hold them off as long as we can."

"Good luck, Lieutenant. We'll send reinforcements, but all our planes are down for maintenance after their constant patrols, and so it'll be a few hours. Command out."

"Copy, Command. Lieutenant Biggs out."

As he returned his gaze to the periscope, the lead vehicle had met the cliff. It was attempting to climb up, but within a few seconds, one of the precarious holds its legs was balanced upon broke, and the walker fell. It landed on its back, and immediately cracked, Rak'te scrambling out just before it caught on fire, ruined. The convoy turned, heading towards the very gap that Gary's group was now racing to.

It appeared that his convoy was slightly faster than the Insectoids, and they had a head start, but they wouldn't have long to fortify before the Insectoids caught up.

As they arrived at the gap, some minutes later, he scrambled out, surveying the narrow defile. It would do for a defensive position. He directed the Bradleys and Abrams into a two-deep line, with the Abrams holding the first line.

Just then, automatic gunfire was heard. He whipped around, as did many of his men, looking for the source of the noise. However, behind them, a man, SPC-4 Manuel Delgado, popped out of the center Abrams, covered in blood. As they turned, he screamed, "For the Great One!" He disappeared into the Abrams, and the Bradleys swiveled their turrets towards the tank, curious as to this disturbance, as no one had caught sight of the man.

However, he stunned everyone as the Abrams turned to its right, dispatching the Abrams there with one loud blast. As most of the soldiers stared in shock, Gary screamed, "Shoot it! Shoot it!" The traitor tank began to turn its turret to the other side, but the leftward Abrams reacted quickly and fired at the traitor, turning it into a piece of slagged junk.

The traitor had wreaked enormous damage on the defensive position. 2 of their 3 heavy hitters now lay in flames in the defile, only one crewman crawling out of the right Abrams, badly burned. None came from the Abrams that had fragged one of their own.

Gary sprinted to his command Bradley. He radioed, "Command, this is Lieutenant Biggs. One of our tankers lost it, he took out an Abrams before getting everyone else in his tank killed by the last Abrams. We've only got one left now. Our position is compromised, there will most likely be an assault now."

Someone on the other end gasped. "Good Lord! God be with you, as luck doesn't look like it'll be with you."

Biggs concluded, "I can't talk long, I'm needed for fortifying. Lieutenant Biggs out."

As he left the Bradley, many of his men were muttering amongst themselves. "What was Manuel thinking? He killed 7 men, then died himself!"

"We're screwed now!"

Biggs stood, not allowing himself to crack. "Men, listen up! I don't know why Manuel lost it, or why he killed some of his good friends, but we have to fortify even more now, or we are all going to die."

The men turned, sullenly reaching for their shovels, still in shock. Biggs said softly, "We are all going to die anyway. But we're going to hold for as long as we can." He shook his head. Manuel had just doomed them all.

As they began to throw up what little dirt walls they could in the little time they had left, the smoke rose into the sky and obscured the sun, casting a shadow on those men of Detachment 1.

10. Stacking Cards

A/N: SOOOOO SORRY! I'm afraid the past two months have been absolutely crazy. That's all I can say. Along with that and some new things I've been doing, I just forgot to write. But here's chapter 10, and the (hopefully) next chapter will be the end of all the setup for all the storylines. Hopefully.

Anyway, enjoy!

Chapter 10: Stacking Cards

****Earth 4, E-Day+4****

As Athena looked at the results of the ongoing battle, she was satisfied. While they were purposely trying to kill as few ships as possible, it was just too easy to kill these ships. Most fell from one shot from the MAC or the Energy Projector. However, their missile defenses were good. Very good. Athena was 99.9999% sure the only hits scored by Archer missiles were those against heavily damaged ships. The others shot them out of the sky in droves. However, in every other way the _Infinity_ was superior.

A comm from the _Justice_ came through. An Elite said, "We have received a transmission from the Demon. He reports that surrender of the flagship is confirmed."

Captain Del Rios stood. "Good. Can you transmitâ€" "

The Elite bowed his head apologetically. "Captain, I'm afraid that we don't have two way communications. The ship's shields are one-way. Transmissions can only come out without being scrambled beyond recognition. Many apologies."

Del Rios sucked on the inside of his cheek. "That may pose a problem. SPARTANS are not the best of negotiators. Especially not Chief. He's

a II, they're worse than the III's or IV's. _Grapp_. " He turned as sat down again. "Guess we just hope for the best. We cannot do anything to change that fact. However, on the bright side, I'm sure that by this point that Chief and Gypsy have more than enough firepower and leverage to force them to do whatever they decide."

As Master Chief jogged through the still-empty hallways, side passages and doors speeding by, he contemplated his choices. He was, like it or not, the highest ranking person here, and as such was liable to receive surrender and dictate terms. Unfortunately, he was a SPARTAN, and a SPARTAN-II at that. He knew he didn't have much tact. That wasn't his purpose. But now he was in a situation that required the utmost tact and a diplomat's mind—both things which Chief and his team lacked. Almost certainly, something was going to _grapp _up with a bang. And if it didn't, it was Chief's considerable supply of luck, not any skill on their part.

By his side were the 4 SPARTANS of Gypsy Team, formerly Gypsy Company. While they were all smaller than him, and not dressed in olive green, their comforting presence helped him forget, even for just a moment, that he was alone.

They neared the bridge, and Dustin warned, "We're closing in on the bridge, Master Chief. Get your game face on."

Master Chief knew that tone, and decided to reply to that with a suitably deadpan response. "You mean game visor. They can't see my face."

Dustin's response, however, threw him off and reminded him that Dustin was not Cortana. "Perhaps you should let them see your face. Might reassure them a measure."

"No. Against protocol, and most likely highly illegal."

"And have you ever truly followed either the laws or protocols if it would hurt your mission?"

"Point."

As they came to the blast door which signified the flag bridge, Chief slowed to his customary walk, looking slow while still eating up ground. He knew that the other members of his team were behind them, and ahead he could see some very nervous guards.

They dropped their weapons as soon as the SPARTANS came into sight, and one of them, who was a private judging from his fresh face, started trembling, visible from several meters away.

While most of the SPARTANS were reserved enough to just crack a smile and perhaps chuckle slightly, Jarvis was not so mature. "Bwahahahah! Look at that kid! He looks like he's got hypothermia!" Chief knew Jarvis was the least mature; he was the youngest. When looking at the behemoths, it was easy to forget that these men and women were just slightly older than he was when he entered service. Chief hadn't bothered to find out, but Jarvis was under 20, and he knew none of them were over 25. Indeed, he was one of the oldest men on the _Infinity_. He was, what, 78 now? Of course, with all of the cryosleep he had undergone, it was closer to 65, but still, that was old for a soldier. He wasn't sure if even the Captain was that

old.

It had been a long time. A long time indeed. But he still had some years in him; he was still the single deadliest man in the UNSC. If he had a say, he'd go down fighting. It was what he was born to do. However, his particular skillset tended to lean towards him dying of old age many years from now.

As he approached the door and stopped in front of the guards, the private's shaking intensified. It looked now like he was having a seizure.

"Open up," stated Chief. His gravelly voice echoed through the tight hallway, and the private's face paled until he looked like one of the colonists from Niflheim: Nearly albinic.

The other man, pale but still composed, tapped a code into the bulkhead control panel, and as it opened, Dustin said, "You know, I could've opened that."

"Yes, I know. But that might not help relations at the moment."

"Congratulations, you've just passed Diplomacy 101!"

Chief banged the back of his helmet, an action that got him odd glances from everyone, including the second guard. He ignored it; he had the right to.

As he passed through the door and entered the flag bridge, he smiled as he heard just what he was expecting: a lecture by the more experienced guard. "Son, you can't pee your pants! Even if they are giant robots, we are MARINES! We don't tremble!"

His attention, however, quickly snapped to the flag bridge, as he scanned it for potential threats. A rather average man, decorated heavily, stood in the middle of the bridge, and the other officers stood behind or around him. There was one he would have to keep an eye on; he looked very angry.

"Admiral Miles, I presume?"

"That is correct."

Admiral Miles sighed. He knew this was the wisest choice, but it still burned giving up the ship to these Mesan freaks. As the blast door hissed open, he caught his first real glimpse of the warriors who had so quickly subdued his ship. His first thought was that they were very large. Nearly scraping the ceiling, they also made quite heavy noises when they walked.

As the green one's visor turned towards him, he noticed something. It was scarred and scratched, obviously from years of conflict. But he was jarred out of his observation as it spoke, a deep gravelly voice, obviously male. "Admiral Miles?"

"That is correct."

"You are now Prisoners of War, in accordance with UNSC Rules of Combat. You are hereby ordered to surrender all weapons to UNSC

personnel and deactivate all weaponry and defensive mechanisms onboard your vessel, as well as order all ships under your command to surrender. Do you comply with these terms?"

He sighed and lowered his head. "I agree with these terms."

Suddenly, the Marine captain stepped forwards, holding a pulser. "Wellâ€"

Inhumanly fast, the green one snapped out a weapon, and with a deafening boom, the captain's hand disappeared. He recoiled and screamed as blood poured from the ruined remains of his right hand, and as everyone stepped back, the green one nodded. Two of the others came forwards, first slapping a first aid kit of some kind onto his arm and then restraining him.

As they removed the first aid kit, it had bandaged the wound with some kind of white foam, which had hardened into a cast-like form.

"Now. You will order all the ships in your force to surrender." The green one holstered his weapon, a whitish-grey pistol, huge compared to a normal pistol. "You have two minutes."

"Lieutenant?" The comms officer returned to his board, before replying, fleet-wide channel open. "This is Admiral Miles. A hostile force has obtained control of our flagship, as well as an unknown number of other systems. I would urge you to surrender. Admiral Miles out."

He cut the connection, but even as the light flashed off, it flashed back on again. A English-accented voice said, "This is Dustin. I'm afraid your good admiral wasn't quite correct; I have control of all of the subsystems in 73% of the surviving fleet. It would be wise to heed her."

One by one, the impeller wedges of the fleet winked off, as finally only the flagship's was powered.

"Admiral, deactivate your flagship. Then you can be taken into custody."

"Do it, Ensign." The ensign nodded, and with the kill switch on his console, the impeller field shuddered and died.

A transmission came through. "â€"This is UNSC _Infinity. _Do you read?"

The green one paused, and a muffled sound could be heard from within.

"Good. Bring the Admiral back to _Infinity _for interrogation. Dustin, take the other ships and follow _Infinity. _We'll be taking cover in the asteroid field in the outer system."

Admiral Miles looked at the green one. "May I ask who just defeated an entire fleet?"

"Sierra-1-1-7, UNSC."

"Your name, not your code number."

"That's classified. My rank is Master Chief Petty Officer."

Admiral Miles sighed. Not only were they hostiles she was still unsure of being human, but they were special forces hostiles. She hated special forces and intelligence. It just caused more problems.

"Lead the way."

****Unknown Universe, E-Day+2****

Honor Harrington grunted as the ship shook and lost power, before the redundant generators kicked on, illuminating the bridge in unusually stark white light. She barked, "Report!" and the reports came flooding in.

"Main power conduits are down, but reactors and backups are green!"

"All main systems report green to fight, Admiral."

"Are the main cameras online?"

"Bringing them on now." An alert immediately beeped. "Ma'am! We have a tachyon signature matching that of the discrepancyâ€"inside the ship."

She whipped her head around. "Seal off that hallway, get everyone out, and then set a guard there. We don't know what tachyons do to people, or what happens when you touch one."

"Ma'am."

As Noble 6 landed with a grunt on the other side of this portal, before catching casually the plummeting forms of each of the others and setting them down, he noticed one thing. This environment was obviously not naturalâ€"it looked like the hallway of a ship.

The second thing he noticed was the guard pointing a weapon at him. He reacted exactly like he had been trainedâ€"whipping out his gun and aiming it at one, creating an instant standoff.

"Admiral! Something just came through the tachyon discrepancy."

"Cameras, now!"

As the holoscreen fizzled into life, showing a full-color image of the hallway, it was evident that something hadn't come through the tachyon disturbance. Rather, someone, or to be more accurate, someones.

In the lead was a behemoth in grey armor, already pointing a weapon of some kind at the two guards, who had reacted in kind. Behind him were 4 very odd creatures. They looked like a cross between skunks or rabbits, and humans! Very,very odd indeed. It looked like something a few twisted minds in the Mesan Alignment would put together.

But the dark blue one, the skunk-hybrid, put out a hand and said something not audible. The gray one incrementally relaxed, though it was unlikely any other than she had noticed it.

"Perhaps not Mesans," she mused.

As Brennan stumbled through the portal, miraculously landing on his feet, he saw an instant Mexican standoff had already formed. Why was not exactly apparent, but he didn't want any more bloodshed today. He would probably break if anyone even got a paper cut, so close to the edge was his tolerance for violence. That screaming...

But he shook his head and said, "Six, did you really already have to pull out a gun? We haven't even said a single word."

Six replied in a low, directed tone, "He had already begun to pull his gun on me before I looked up. Get back."

But Brennan had had quite enough today. "No! I will not back off and watch as another man gets more killing today. Understand?" He got right up into the crouched Six's face, an interesting turnaround from the gibbering wreck he had been just a few minutes ago.

The guard was watching this in a kind of sick fascination, and his gun had started drooping to the ground as he stared, agape, at this odd spectacle.

Six sighed, before nodding almost imperceptibly. "No killing. I give my word." Holding gazes with Brennan until he broke away satisfied, Six simply grabbed the man's weapon, down due to astonishment, before breaking it in half with his hand and tossing it aside. "See? No killing."

But it was at this point that a fully-armored security team poured in the door behind the now-weaponless security guard. All with weapons pointed at Six.

Brennan facepalmed. "Are. You. freaking. Kidding. Me."

Honor wasn't exactly sure what was going on, but it seemed the diminutive hybrid had just stared down the behemoth, nearly twice his size! It was astonishing, and frankly laughable, but that ended when the behemoth grabbed her guards' weapon and snapped it in half with one hand.

Must be a command matter; it was obviously not a power matter. But it was at this point the rapid-reaction team poured in with guns pointed. It was obvious to those already there that the intentions on both sides were not deadly, but the introduction of new people might have just upset that.

Honor sighed. "Are you kidding me." Quickly pressing a button, she commed to the team, "This is Admiral Harrington. Stand down, now, and take a few steps back. You may have just escalated the situation. Seriously."

****Earth Prime, E-Day+2****

Gary surveyed their meager defenses grimly. Though there were dirt

walls large enough for everyone to take cover in, there was no time to cover the Bradleys or the Abrams. The men were still in shock and demoralized. Manuel's shocking act of treachery had fatally weakened their flesh and steel defenses, but perhaps harder hit were the defenses in the men's mind. They were no longer the confident, wise-cracking men they had been only a few minutes ago. Now they were sullen and depressed, with conversation grinding to an abrupt halt.

And the Insectoids were close; you could hear the engines on the crawlers rumbling now. "Everyone, get to your positions!" he yelled, pointing out some of the embankments. "Don't let them get around us!"

As they scrambled behind the embankments, the first of the crawlers turned the corner, and behind and to the sides of it were several dozen Insectoids on foot. The noise grew much greater; you had to shout to be heard over the din.

"Fire!" he yelled, pointing at the tank. The Abrams boomed, and the walker paused for half a second. Then it exploded, fire from the insides ripping apart the tank and killing many of the infantry too close. The Bradley's machine guns chattered, and the remaining Insectoids were torn apart by several hundred bullets.

But now around the bend came two walkers in step, with three times the infantry. The Abrams reacted quickly, swiveling its turret and blowing the first walker up in a similar fashion. The second walker fired its main weapon with a mighty boom, but it flew over the Abrams and impacted several yards beyond, leaving a smoking crater.

It too joined its friends in death, but the infantry were nearly unscathed this time. Green trails, led by bullets, began to rip through the air above the embankment. Most pinged off of the Abrams' heavy armor, but the few, larger, bullets, trailing a streak of red, destroyed the reactive armor surrounding the Abrams.

Throughout all of this, it remained eerily empty of one usual sound. In every battle that warranted injured or dead men, there were the inevitable groans and screams of the wounded. But the Insectoids remained silent, not a sound escaping them. Even the bleeding ones on the ground made nary a single sound.

It was unnerving, along with the strange whines that the incendiary bullets they fired made. Once again, the machine guns on the vehicles tore them apart, and soon there were no more bullets being fired.

Another two walkers came around, but this time they were ready. The first one fired, and missed, blowing a crater just ahead of the embankments to the Abrams' right. The second walker fired after a few seconds, and hit right on.

Though the Abrams was better designed with fire in mind, and therefore didn't explode, a gaping hole had been torn in the turret. Flames began to lick from within, and only two men escaped, those that had been in the lower hull. The other two were nowhere to be seen.

Main cannons barked, and after several rapid-fire hits, this walker,

too, succumbed. But their heavy hitter was down. As the next round of walkers turned the corner, the TOWs on half of the Bradleys spat out a missile, crashing into a walker. Though it lurched and reeled, the tank was still standing, and so a second set of missiles was dispatched to put it down.

The second tank fired, glancing a hit off the side of the right Bradley. The side was nearly ripped away, and the men quickly scrambled out of the Bradley, all but one making it out before a second boltâ€” shot just before the walker was destroyedâ€”turned it into a flaming wreck.

It was evident that until they ran out of TOW missiles, they could turn back the walkers. Apparently, the Rak'te had realized that too. Instead of another pair of walkers, a single walker and a horde of infantry blew around the corner to the small pass.

TOWs soon spat another volley, then a second, and the walker crashed to the ground, joining the littered remnants of its brethren. But the infantry proved more resilient.

The main cannons on the Bradley weren't meant for anti-infantry work, though they attempted to do so valiantly. The machine guns were superb, but felling so many enemies left the ammo dangerously low. Though every Insectoid was felled, it took a large chunk out of the machine gun's supplies.

James Thorn, the commander of the lead Bradley, opened his cupola in between the two waves.

>"Sir! We're almost out of ammo for the .50 cal's. We won't take another wave without your support."<p>

Gary cursed under his breath. "That's a big problem. We need to hold here for a long time." He sucked his lower lip, deep in thought, for a few moments. "I've got aâ€”"

But yet another wave, completely comprised of infantry, rushed their position, and Thorn clanged back into his vehicle. The firing started again, but as the wave progressed, one, then two, then five, machine guns clicked empty. The Insectoids made it within 50 feet before they were all cut down.

James popped out of his Bradley again. "Sir?"

"I've got a solution. When your Bradleys run empty, run them sideways in the spot they occupy, and keep using the main gun. That way we'll have a shield back here."

"Sir!" With a rumble, five Bradleys started, and turned to the right, wedging themselves firmly as part of the defensive works. The turrets turned to face outwards. Just as the last Bradley shut down with a diminishing growl, the Insectoids sent yet another wave of infantry.

Gary jumped off the small knoll he had been standing on, running to take cover behind the earthenworks. "Fire at will, people! We can't count on the machine guns any more." They popped up, their heads and guns the only possible targets.

As they joined the racous gathering of lead and fire, the remaining

Bradleys exhausted their machine guns and began to move with a groan, still firing all the while. The Insectoids made it within 30 feet this timeâ€”and they took their first infantry casualty.

Private Jenkins had been overeager, and in his zeal had popped up a bit more over the barrier than was prudent, or indeed, safe. A bullet took the back of his head out, and he flopped to the ground, blood already staining the earth and loose grass red. The men on either side of him stared in shock for a moment, before the one on the left took a grazing hit, carving a furrow in his helmet and knocking him to the ground.

With a cry of rage, he began to fire as fast as he could pull the trigger, and his new neighbor soon joined.

But now the next wave came inexorably, this time with a duo of walkers. Now unable to use their machine guns, the Bradleys concentrated on the tanks, but that left the infantry unmolested, and soon the fire grew thick as they came into range.

In the firestorm, they lost two more Bradleys and another man, and Gary couldn't tell how many men had made it out of the Bradleys. Now they lay, fiery hulks only good as metal shields against the hail of fire.

The Insectoids made it all the way to the base of the earthenworks this time, before the last one was riddled by three men simultaneously.

"Bayonets! Bayonets!" Gary called, and it was repeated down the line. They were down to half their armor strength, and numbers were telling. The Insectoids seemed to be able to throw men at them.

Gary knew with a certainty this is what the Wermacht must have felt as they attempted to hold this pass against the Russians, back in '45. They could just throw more men at you, and when you had few tanks, fewer supplies, and a meager amount of men, you could hold out only so long in even the best of positions. '_We have reserves,' _Gary thought grimly.

And yet another wave poured around the edge of the pass. "Keep firing!" he screamed, even as a bullet took off Corporal Juarez's ear.

End
file.